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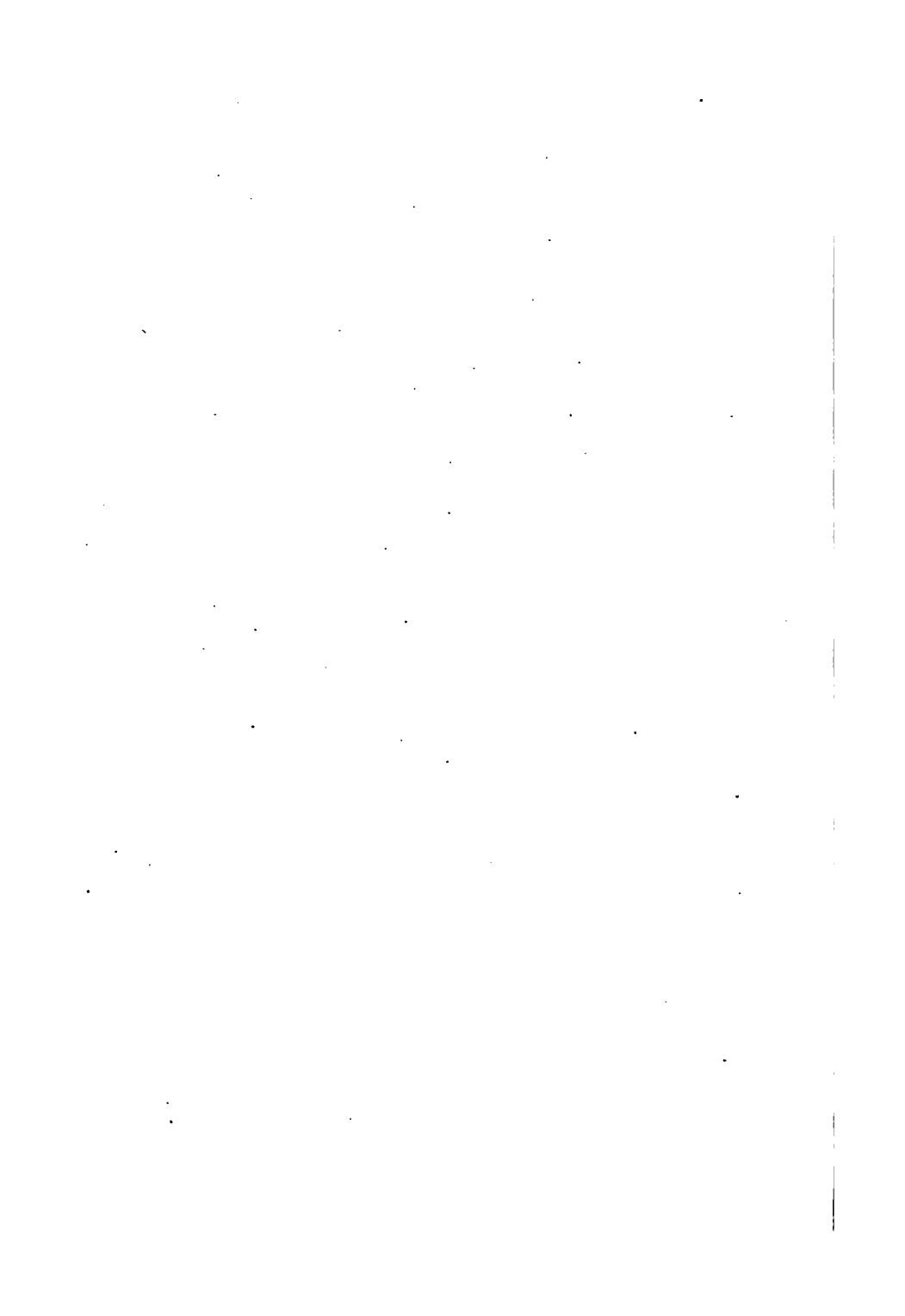
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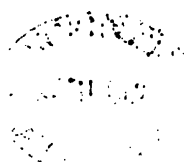


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A MOTHER'S IDOL



A MOTHER'S IDOL

BY

LYDIA HOPE

"And hence one master-passion in the breast,
Like Aaron's serpent, swallows up the rest."—POPE.

In Three Volumes

VOL. I.



LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND

1882

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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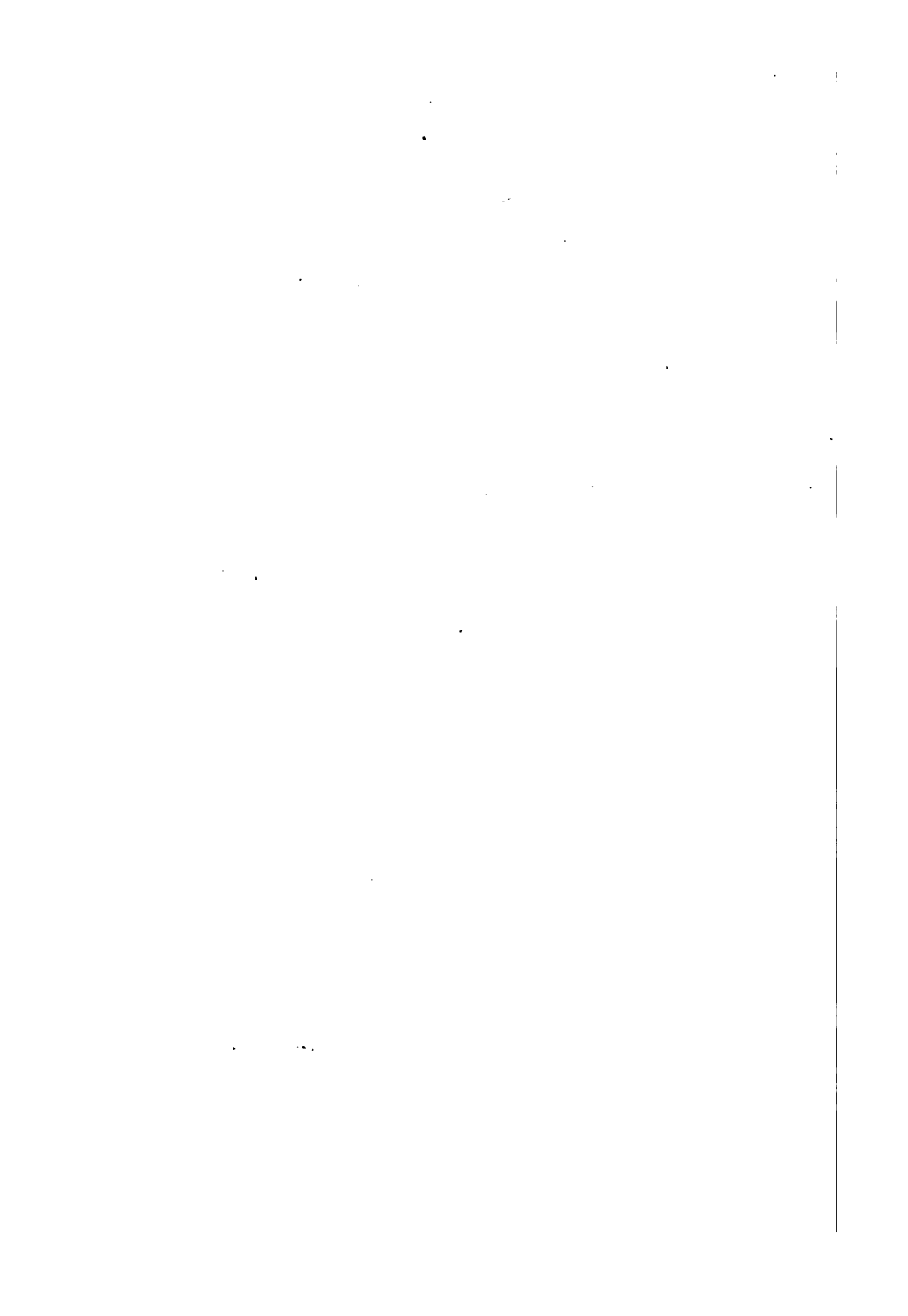
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A MOTHER'S IDOL.

CHAPTER I.

THE COTTAGE HOME.

WE lived, my mother, Lottie, and I, in a little cottage on Durnford Common, in one of the southern counties. It was a very wee place, only an "eight-roomed tenement," as advertisements say; but it was pretty to look at, with its latticed windows enshrined in jessamine and clematis, with a famous old Gloire de Dijon poking its beautiful tendrils in at every available chink and cranny, and having to be reluctantly repressed, for much as we loved our dear flowers we loved the blessed sunshine, of which they sought to deprive us, still more. We had not much else than these pretty flowers to boast of, for we were very poor; yet I often think our small

drawing-room looked cosier, more homelike, more refined than many a big reception-room, resplendent with ormolu and satin.

My mother had a wonderful knack in arrangement. Even the few bits of old china, and other relics of former prosperous days, were so disposed as to give almost an air of distinction, while the exquisite neatness, the dainty trimness of everything made poverty hide its diminished head, keeping from us that "pity me" sort of air which shabby furniture is so apt, when neglected, to put on.

We had lived in this small abode almost ever since I could remember. My mother's married life had been bright and prosperous. My father had a good appointment in the Mauritius. Being rather extravagant, he lived there in great luxury; but this did not last long, for he died of fever somewhat suddenly, when I was four years old, and Lottie a little baby.

His death was not only a lifelong grief to the poor widow who idolized him, but other consequences came which certainly did not diminish, but rather tended to increase, the weight of woe which pressed on her. When my father's affairs were looked into after his death, it was found that such private means as he had must all go to defray the expenses his lavish mode of living had led him into. He

was a man of great abilities, with much confidence in his own powers, so made sure that one good appointment after another would be given to one so efficient and up to the mark as he was. The necessity of laying by for a rainy day never occurred to him, still less did he contemplate the possibility of dying in the very prime of life. His last moments were most painful to witness, for when he realised that the greatest change of all awaited him, when he knew that he must leave his dear wife and children almost penniless, his sufferings were very great. My poor mother, as she knelt by her dying husband, gave no thought to aught else save that he was leaving her, that he was going from her alone into that dark unknown, the thoughts of which had come so little into their joyous life. She strove, and we must hope not unsuccessfully, to turn his mind away from worldly cares. It was ever a life-long comfort to her that no selfish consideration for herself or her children led her to add to his sore burden in those last sorrowful moments.

Never did she blame him to any human being, perhaps not even to her own heart, when she found that all that was left was her own small inheritance and a tiny annuity given her by Government in recognition of her husband's services.

She settled down in this cottage home at Durnford, with a wise resolution to make the best of things, to get as much out of her small income as she could for the well-being of her darlings; and as Durnford was a quiet, not expensive place, we did very well indeed. We had no luxuries certainly, often had to say "we must do without," but I don't think we girls were a bit the worse, nay, we were rather the better for this discipline. We had many friends, we were well born, which tells more in the country than in towns; besides, everyone took to the gentle refined little widow, who, though not clever, was bright and intelligent, and had such a pleasant cordial welcome to give to those who came to see her.

So, our richer neighbours were most kind to us, while for the poorer ones—ah! there it was my mother felt the pinch of poverty the most. Hers was such a large-hearted nature that to have to deny herself in her charities was most trying to her, but still it was wonderful what she managed to do after all; the old dresses turned, twisted, and furbished up, then given away. We girls used sometimes to grumble though, when we saw sundry of the village girls looking like our shabby doubles. Then there were the things spared from the frugal table, when mother would say: "I am sure we can manage to

give some of this to poor Mrs. So-and-So, if you don't mind." Sometimes in our earlier and greedier days, I fear we did mind, but that perhaps enhanced the merit of the sacrifice, at least we will hope so. Last, not least, she gave much sympathy; a help the poor value more than we have any idea of, especially when they know the gentlefolks have to practise economy almost as much as they do, for then they neither seek nor expect so much, and are content with the small gift, the kindly thought.

I, being the eldest, was naturally an important member in our small household. I was too, I fear, somewhat of a "bustler." I loved fresh air, exercise, and plenty to do. I even loved early rising; not perhaps that one terrible moment, when we emerge from our warm envelope of coverings into the chill air—weak human nature usually shrinks from that disagreeable diurnal experience—but what came after recompensed me for the effort. I was strong and healthy, so the stinging cold of my bath, followed by the rush out on the Common for the pure morning breeze, always sent me back to breakfast with every vein tingling with the mere enjoyment of existence.

Lottie, my youngest sister, was very different to me, was a complete contrast in every way. I was dark and small, Lottie tall and fair, a lovely blonde,

moving about our small rooms like a perpetual misfit—one could not but feel that spacious apartments alone beseemed that stately form.

As “to be busy” naturally falls into the organisation of all families, where only one servant is kept, so Lottie too did her share of work, but somehow what was lightest and easiest was by tacit consent assigned to her, while the slightest plea of weariness or headache was at once accepted. Thus “our beauty” led almost as do-nothing a life as many a fine lady. She was not strong, while mother and I were, so perhaps it was only in the fitness of things that we should work and she rest; but she did her work this way, her unfailing good-humour, her lazy acquiescence in things as they were, caused her to be a most restful inmate in our house, and when we had time to do so we enjoyed the atmosphere of repose she seemed to diffuse around her.

We had had a fairly good education: my mother taught us all she knew; besides, we were like the famed robins in the “Parables of Nature,” for “little bits of things did turn up unexpectedly,” such as the advent of a very clever French lady in our village, who, out of pure love for my mother, gave us lessons for very little. Then Lady Sarah Vernon, our wealthiest neighbour, one day bethought her it would be a great

advantage to her only little girl if we shared in her lessons and profited by her governess, at least so Lady Sarah kindly put it. Thus, one way and another, we picked up a good deal, more perhaps than most of the girls around us.

Children conscious of well-to-do parents, and a perfect plethora of educational advantages surrounding them, are not half so eager to avail themselves of them as those are who feel each bit of learning must be seized as it comes, or it may be the only chance of knowing this or that. Certainly Florence Vernon did not get half as much out of her lessons as we did, or even have so much enjoyment in them; but then Lady Sarah was much out in society, so could not throw herself into her girl's studies, as mother was able to do in those evening hours when she would go over the, to her, old familiar ground, for the pure pleasure of working with and helping us.

When I grew up I entered, as far as our slender means permitted, into such small gaieties as were around us. I enjoyed everything—anticipation, realisation, and, most of all, the talking it over at home. My only drawback was that Lottie was too young to go out with me. I always felt she ought to be the “come out” daughter, when I, who from my small stature looked so ridiculously young, left this

tall stately creature at home. Not that she minded it a bit. "Don't fidget about it, Muriel," she would say, when, dressed and ready to start for some festivity, I would grumble at leaving her behind. "It will all come in good time, and I know when it does I shan't like it half as well as you do, or excite myself into such a fever. It is lucky I am not so energetic as you, or this wee house would not hold the two of us." Then she would placidly stretch herself full length on the sofa, which seemed hers *par excellence*, and soon forget me and everything else in the pages of some favourite book.

Only one thing at all marred, and that but slightly, my pleasure in the two or three years which followed my rustic *début*. It was "the curate," my only admirer; and oh! it was a most uncomfortable experience of that sentiment called love. Our dear old Rector had a succession of curates who either did or did not do, but who never tarried long among us. The adoration they met with from most of our young ladies fully checked in me any tendency to the curateolatry which pervades so many of our country places.

Somehow I have always felt that the clergy, till they get old and gray-headed, with the sanctity of age about them, are far more to my taste in church than out; nearer approach to them is disillusionising,

therefore I avoided as much as I could our clerical beaux. Perhaps it was because of my plan of avoidance that one gentle, fair, very fair-haired specimen, whom I referred to above as "the" or rather "my curate," was induced to seek me out, as a slightly piquant contrast to the too great appreciation showered on him by the other girls. I scarcely noticed that he marked me out with timid attentions, with much approbation, bleating in a lamb-like way soft nothings into ears which heard little of what he said. At last one day he made me listen to him, and that at a most inappropriate time.

Croquet was dying out; its illness an old age of pure weariness. Young vigorous tennis was replacing it, and I had already elected myself as one of its warmest adherents, and flattered myself I had attained some small proficiency thereat, when, on a fine summer's afternoon, while I was waiting to play a crowning game, "my curate" inveigled me behind some laurels on some specious pretext; then, blushing up to the roots of his pale hair till I wondered whether he could become much redder, he stammered out a proposal, laying himself, metaphorically, at my feet. I was sorry for the poor man, I really was; and yet it was hard to hear, "Where can Miss Sterling be?" then my name shouted out, and yet

to feel that every impulse of good feeling must restrain the longing I felt to tell him "I was wanted, and that I wanted to go." No! I must in respect to him listen and answer, as he had got so far; so, in dismay, I heard the cries for me die away, and the game recommence with, no doubt, that stupid Jane Cresswell in my place, who would be sure to lose us the match—and who did. It was extremely childish of me to be caring about tennis when a hand and an honest true heart were being offered for my acceptance; but love had scarcely entered into my thoughts; mine was a too busy, practical, bright existence for that feeling so often born of only idleness or ennui. Therefore I did not realise what it was to this poor male creature who stood trembling before me, awaiting my reply. It has often pained me since to think of the cool off-hand refusal I gave him; not truly from flippancy or hardness of heart, but from such complete ignorance of the storm of feeling my insignificant self had raised in that meek nature. Perhaps, though, my indifference did him much good; for, seeing he had not even penetrated into the outer circle of my liking, his passion for me cooled the sooner. And shall I confess the truth? Some slight mortification did awake in me, when, four months later, I heard he was engaged to that very Jane Cresswell who more

efficiently replaced me in the love lists than in those of lawn-tennis.

When I told my mother of my small adventure, she sighed, saying: "He was good, and a gentleman, dear, and had private means; I am almost sorry you said 'No' so decidedly, but still I do not wish you to marry where you cannot love, and I do not wish to lose you yet." Then she and I spoke no more about it, and our contented life went on scarce ruffled by this one small breeze of romance which had blown across it.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

Now I come to the end of my early bright life, and to the sad change in our fortunes which awaited us. My sister was seventeen and I had just attained my majority, but we did not therefore roast a whole ox in our small garden to entertain our neighbours. The only celebration of an event so important to me was an extra-good cake for tea, and the gift of a new hat which I had long coveted. Two days after this great day, came letters with the direful news that the bank in which all our little money was, as my mother thought, so carefully invested, had suspended payment. Thus all our property at one fell swoop was gone, and even if in time anything could be rescued from the wreck, it would be pitifully small. This was to us three women a crushing blow. I shall not soon forget that morning of deep depression in

our hitherto cheery home. There was nothing, at any rate for the present, left to us save the Government annuity, and that would die with mother, and even while we had it, would not suffice to maintain us.

We could not at first discuss ways and plans, it was all too confusing; we only went over and over again our wonder and distress, and thought what we could give up so that we might fit into the small yearly sum, now our sole subsistence. At last we lapsed into a dreary silence. My mother had cried herself into a splitting headache. It was not like her to break down so entirely, but the blow was so unexpected, and as she said: "There will be nothing for you girls when I am gone." Then came the query: "What can we do?" Finally the irrepressible longing of the widowed heart caused the cry: "Oh that he were here to help us!" It was after that, that we felt for the moment our usual helper and comforter had failed us. But I knew her bright brave nature would assert itself at last, that she was too good to despair for ever; and seeing it was best to leave her to herself, I darkened the room and made her lie on the sofa.

I left Lottie to look after her and change the cool bandages I had placed on her aching brow, then I ran out of the room, for I felt I must be alone to take counsel with myself. But I found when I was in my

own sanctum I could not think as I wished. I wanted the cool air of the Common around me. My first wish in trouble is to get out of doors if I can, to break away from the restraints of four cramped-in walls, to feel myself in space and air, and over me God's beautiful sky. So I hurried on hat and jacket, then left the house, walking so swiftly past the other houses which bordered the Common, that those who met me, thinking I was much hurried, did not seek to detain me. I soon arrived at my favourite haunt, the highest part of the Common, which I generally had pretty much to myself; nor was this day an exception to the rule. The ground was one mass of golden gorse, a more perfect cloth of gold than ever was woven in loom, or praised in history. The afternoon was simply exquisite that bright spring day; the sky a brilliant blue, flecked with delicate fleecy clouds, the air soft, clear, yet cool and invigorating. It was just as I liked it best for the pacing up and down of my "out-door parlour," as I called it, and which was my favourite resort for the better thinking-out of the million and one fancies which so lightly flit through a young girl's brains. It did me good even then that it was all so bright and perfect. At first I wandered about, forgetting all trouble, and simply enjoying the air, the light, the quiver of being all around me.

When at last I turned to what had brought me there, somehow I felt I could better grapple with the dread which had been looming over me ever since we had received our bad news.

"After all, it is only money," I thought, with all the ignorant inconsequence of youth. "If mother or Lottie were ill, how much more dreadful that would be! Even this, too, might be worse, for there is still that annuity, so mother can't starve at any rate, though it may be pinch—pinch to the end of the chapter. When she has gone from us"—somehow the world around me seemed less bright and beautiful, a shadow darkened over it when that thought came to me, but I was resolved to pursue all thinking to either its sweet or its bitter end, so soliloquised on—"when she is gone, Lottie, with her beautiful face, is sure to be married, and I, oh, I can always manage somehow. But what's the use of troubling about the future, when it is the present we must provide for? There is no doubt that what is left to live upon is not enough for four, barely for three people; yet I cannot bear that Susan should have to leave us—she who has been our faithful friend for so many years; besides, even if she were to go, help must be had in sometimes, and that almost costs as much. No," I said, half aloud, "there is but the one way out of all this trouble, and it came

into my mind so soon as we read those horrid letters, only I felt I must think it over first before speaking to them. I must earn money somehow; probably must go away to do so. There are but two things, alas, which a destitute young lady can do. Be a governess, or a companion. I would rather not be the latter. I would not care to give up the rest of my life as bond-slave to some crotchety old lady, whose caprice it would be never to be satisfied. The first would be the best. I can quite well teach children up to twelve; my wages would pay my clothes, and my keep would be saved at home. Perhaps even I could spare a pound here and there to send to mother. Yes! I ought to be a governess."

The tears rushed to my eyes as I looked on the fair scene I loved so dearly, and thought of the happy home it would be such pain to leave.

I feared, too, I had no real vocation for the work; it was not that I disliked children, quite the contrary. But children all day, every day, glad or sorry, sick or well, in or out of the mood, never to be free from them; no more solitary rambles, no precious time to myself, no more of the pleasant little gaieties I so enjoyed, no good-tempered Lottie to joke with, and, oh! more than all, no mother to help me, to take my worries to.

I suppose it was a hard fight for a young girl, which I fought out that afternoon on the Common. I knew well my mother would never suggest my going away—that it would be hard for her even to acquiesce in my suggestion, though she must and would see how right and wise it was; so this matter must be settled, this battle fought out all by myself.

When I had at last fully made up my mind, I still lingered another half-hour on my “field of cloth of gold,” waiting for the cool wind to blow away the traces of the many tears I could not help shedding. By-and-by the sweet influences around me once more stole over a mind no longer debating or puzzling within itself, and so comparatively at rest. I suppose it was because no real heart-sore trouble had yet come to me, that my intense love of scenery gave Nature so great a power of soothing. In after times, when real sorrow visited me, there were moments when even sunshine and flowers jarred on me. But that afternoon I was almost childishly forgetting my woes, as I looked now at the beautiful gorse and heather, or gazed up into the sky, or watched a bumble-bee flit from one spray to another, or admired some specially gorgeous butterfly.

At last the church clock striking five warned me that our tea hour was imminent. I hurried home to

find mother, her head a little better, sitting up and talking to our good old Rector and his wife, who had called to see her, and were much grieved at our bad news.

"Cannot your people help you, dear Mrs. Sterling?" said Mrs. Leslie. "In all these years you have lived quietly, troubling no one; surely, now, they will be glad to do what they can."

"I don't know that anyone can do much," said my mother, sighing. "I have only one brother, and he has, as you know, a large family. His boys are extravagant. I am sure he could not spare anything; nor would I ask him. As for my dear husband's relations, they have always been sufficiently kind, but they are not rich, and they never quite forgave Edward's marrying a girl without money; so I will not appeal to them if I can manage without. We have always been independent, we must try to remain so. I must think of what we can do at home. I wonder if I could keep a school?"

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie shook their heads. Durnford, from its healthy situation, was a place already swarming with scholastic establishments of all kinds. They knew my mother would have a very poor chance of getting pupils; also the cottage, which, because of its almost nominal rent, was the cheapest abode we

could live in, was much too small to have available accommodation even for day boarders.

"I am not sure that plan will do," said the Rector; "perhaps Muriel, with her active brain, can help us out of this difficulty, can suggest, can even do something."

I coloured, and was just beginning: "The idea has struck me," when mother said hastily: "My girls are too young to work, I cannot let them do so," and burst into tears.

It was clearly wiser not to discuss the subject any more just then. Our kind visitors took their leave, feeling we were perhaps best by ourselves till our trouble and we had grown more used to each other.

I took special pains over the making of the tea that afternoon, and crisped some toast to perfection. By the time our small meal was over, and we had drawn our chairs to the fire for our usual after-tea gossip, we were all more composed and able to discuss things.

I then first unfolded my scheme, presenting it to our tiny assembly with quite a cheerful air, as if I rather liked the idea than otherwise. "I am sure change will improve me. I have scarcely ever been out of Durnford, and shall grow quite musty and fusty if I see nothing of the world," was the conclusion of my speech.

"Oh Muriel! don't tell such awful fibs," broke in Lottie; "you know you said the other day you would like to live and die in Durnford, that you could never be happy away from it. How can you pretend you wish to go away? But you don't wish it at all, you know you don't. I cannot bear that you should leave us and be dreadfully bullied as a governess. Yes! you would be, for you are just one of those who will be always doing for others, and it will be, 'Miss Sterling, would you do this? or do you mind that?' from morning till night. You are not one to stand up for yourself as you ought. I tell you we won't let you go. Let us all starve comfortably here instead. We will cultivate small appetites, and scrimp in clothes. Mother shall burn the candle-ends down to the minutest bits; but you shall not go."

Here Lottie stopped, her cheeks looked flushed, and she was splendidly handsome in her unwonted excitement. I was so surprised at this outburst from one usually so quiet and apathetic that I could not speak. Mother, however, now took up her parable in the weak gentle tones of one who has wept most of her voice away:

"Stop, Lottie dear. There is no use in talking so impetuously; something must be done, that is quite certain. What Muriel says is very wise; though,

before tea, when the idea first presented itself to me, of Muriel having to go and work for us, I broke down. And, love," she added, turning her sweet pleading eyes towards me, "if you have to leave us, if you have to go among strangers, I think it will cost me very much. But perhaps it may not be necessary; surely we can do something here which will save the need of parting. I would even rather keep a shop than send you from home."

"Keep a shop!" exclaimed Lottie indignantly. "Lose caste as ladies! Impossible!"

My mother smiled sadly as she answered:

"You foolish child, no honest effort for livelihood in which we could keep our refined natures, would ever make us lose caste as gentlewomen. Those who value us for ourselves, whose friendship is worth having, would value us as much, even if we did keep a shop. It would be to me an unspeakable comfort not to part from either of my girls—indeed, the shop would be the lesser trial to me; but, alas, there are other objections in the way, far more valid than yours. We have no capital wherewith to start a business, no capital to fall back upon should it prove a failure, and I doubt if we should get enough customers here to make it pay. There is no use in thinking of that plan. I would leave the cottage and move into a still

more tiny house, if that would do any good ; but we could never get one with so small a rent as this, and the expenses of moving are impossible to us."

Mother sighed—indeed, she had sighed more that day than I ever remember her doing before—and then said :

"Muriel, yours is the only feasible plan we have yet thought of."

I started, for so convinced was I that they must eventually agree with me, that I had paid less attention than might be supposed to what was being said, and was absorbed in either gazing into the fire or at the three neat pairs of feet extended before us on the fender ; but now I gave earnest heed to mother's words, as she went on :

"If you have to be a governess, my dear child, we must try to see it in its brightest light. You may get among kind people, who will make you happy, and though you do not like teaching, the feeling you are helping us will make it more endurable. Lottie and I will take our share of work too. She will take your place in the house, and cease to be the lazy young woman she has been till now. I shall hope to get one or two pupils for music ; so we will all contribute grist to the mill in our different ways. Then there will be the holidays to look forward to,

when you will be with us. It will go hard with the old mother if she does not manage to scrape up the money for your journeys," finished mother, fondly stroking my hair as I leant against her. I knew she and I would soon see matters from the same point of view ; but Lottie still kept looking gloomily before her, refusing to be comforted.

It was very unlike her, this gloom, but somehow it did my heart good to see how much more she valued me than I had supposed. I was a regular *gobemouche* in the way of affection. I felt I could never absorb enough into my existence. However, as we went on talking cheerily and brightly, she was shamed out of her discontent; then straightway rushing into the opposite extreme, began to castle-build on my behalf, exclaiming :

"I daresay, after all, Muriel will light on her legs. I have not read novels for nothing. Heroines who go out as governesses, always end by marrying the son and heir, a nice young man just home from Oxford, or a promising young curate in a neighbouring parish; or they get a fortune left them by some old lady charmed with their sweet humility; or they save a daughter of the house from a mad bull, and for ever after are provided for by the grateful parents."

She was still going on, when my laughter brought

her down to the realms of common-sense and reasonable discussion. We settled most preliminaries that evening. We were first to make inquiries among friends; if they failed, we were to advertise. But any way, it was clear that I must be quick in trying to get a situation, for the sooner I could set to work earning money, the better.

"How much salary am I worth, mother?"

"If you went at my valuation, love, it would be a large one, but we must look at your attainments from a stranger's point of view."

"I will reckon up," said Lottie, beginning to check off on her fingers. "English very good, one; French, ditto, two; a smattering of German, three; music, capital, four—you know you play splendidly, and though your voice is not strong, it is nice what there is of it. Then there are water-colours and lots of ologies."

"Please stop, Lottie," I gasped; "indeed you are exaggerating horribly. English, French, and music are the only things I can honestly mention as good; while as for water-colours, German, and ologies, you know they are nowhere. Still, I do think, mother, I may ask thirty pounds."

"I think, Muriel, you may ask forty if not fifty pounds," said my mother, "for you know

Lottie's first three items unusually well, while the rudiments of the others, and your excellent references, will and ought to stand you in good stead."

So saying, we closed the conversation for that night at least.

CHAPTER III.

ADVERTISING.

DURING the next few days we went among our various friends, asking if they knew of any family who would like me as a governess. We met with much sympathy when people heard of our reverses, but no one seemed to know of anything to suit, though all promised to look out. However, we could not wait long, so decided on advertising. It was the first time we had ever put an advertisement in the papers. We puzzled mightily over the wording thereof, till it struck Lottie, sapient Lottie, it would be best to borrow a *Times*, so getting an idea about it that way. This was the result of our searchings :

AS GOVERNESS.—A young lady seeks an engagement where the children are not over fourteen ; she knows English, French, and music, thoroughly ; also the rudiments of German and drawing. The best references. Salary £50. Address, M. S., The Cottage, Durnford Common, Blankshire.

"I feel two inches taller, mother, when I see myself written down as knowing so much," I remarked, as I put the advertisement into an envelope and directed it.

"You don't know half as much as most of the advertisements profess to do," said Lottie, "but I expect the accomplishments are half of them dummies, like the jellies in pastrycooks' shops. Why, here is one lady," she continued, reading out from the paper, "who professes to teach English, German, Italian, music, drawing, mathematics, etc., all perfectly. Do you believe she does? If so, it is a beautiful instance of faith on your part, that's all I've got to say about it. Here, there's another. Oh Muriel, mother, how funnily this reads. After an immense number of qualifications, this lady demands 'the privilege of attending a meeting of Open Brethren on the morning of the Lord's day desired, if near.' What does that mean?" Here my young sister opened her big blue eyes in amazement.

My mother could not enlighten her, she had never before heard of a sect called Open Brethren: and, though she could not help smiling, she checked, as she always did, any sally of merriment on our part at things with which, as she said, we could not agree, but still must hold in respect, though she added:

"I must confess I should not care to see Muriel's advertisement worded that way."

How eagerly we watched the post for answers. Six came on the third day, and we held consultation over them. One, we decided, would not do; the *lady* wrote as if she regarded a governess as only a sort of intellectual upper-servant, proposing various additions to my work which were slightly incompatible with my position. Among other items, I was to wash the heads of my four pupils every Saturday night, and to darn the stockings of the whole family—master included, I suppose. Another answer was from a widower, who stated he wanted me for his two little girls; I was also to play and read to him in the evenings. He asked my age and demanded my photo. Mother flushed as she read this letter, and quietly saying she thought this would not do either, flung it into the fire.

The next two were very effusive, the first specially so, offering the quiet seclusion of a peaceful country life with warm kindness; but added, both were so rare to find and so priceless that the lady thought twenty pounds a-year was more than adequate for services so recompensed.

How we laughed over the fourth letter; for we were a family abounding in that blessed sense of

humour which pulls one through worries of all sorts. It was from a worthy gentleman-farmer's wife, was full of genuine kindness, promising I should find my bed well aired, and should have my meals regular and comfortable. She consented to the salary, though she confessed she thought it large; but she was willing to pay even more to have her daughters made ladies of. She particularly hoped I was strong and resolute, as she required a governess who would be firm, and keep her daughters away from the stables, farmyards, and farm-servants.

"I scarcely think, Muriel, you have force and strength enough, at only twenty-one, to control young ladies with such tastes, no doubt already strongly developed," remarked my mother.

So these four were put aside, with a feeling of discouragement at our want of success hitherto, when the door opened and in came Lady Sarah Vernon, who had only just heard of our trouble, having been from home till the previous day. In she bustled, full of sympathy, but with none of the patronage mingled with it which, report said, she showed to some of her neighbours. However, mother was not easily to be patronised; she was so simple and natural that people were just

themselves with her, and airs were impossible. She and Lady Sarah were as pleasantly friends as two people, so opposite in disposition, could be.

"I see what you are about," said our visitor, as she saw the letters strewing our table, and we three in full conclave. "I heard of your advertisement, Muriel; I suppose these are the answers? May I help you with them? Perhaps I might know something of the people."

We told her of the impossible four we had just read, and then Lottie said:

"Perhaps it will bring us luck, Lady Sarah, if you will open the other two."

Lottie had a happy knack of making pretty speeches. She knew so well this was just what would please our visitor, who at once took her place among us and proceeded to open the envelopes.

Lady Sarah Vernon was an unusual-looking woman, tall, and of portly dimensions; one of those people who make a small room look smaller as they diffuse the sense of amplitude around them. She was a fine woman, in velvet and diamonds, as she sailed through her spacious reception-rooms, but she was very much too much, in her bonnet and huge village cloak in our tiny

chamber. She was extremely near-sighted, and as she sat applying the envelopes to her eyes, the only way of really expressing the nearness with which objects had to be approached to her visual organs, she struck me, as she often did, in a somewhat comical aspect. Yet she was so kind that day and did so truly help us!

The first letter she opened was from a country parsonage, from whence a wish was expressed to engage me, if I were willing to help among the poor, superintend mothers'-meetings, night-schools, etc., and if I could be contented with thirty pounds.

"She shan't go there," said Lady Sarah emphatically; "she is worth every farthing of her fifty pounds, with her talent for music and her pretty French accent. Now let us look at No. 6," and she proceeded to read aloud, in a clear pleasant voice, a letter from a Mrs. Davenel, of The Chase, Davenel, Northshire. This lady wrote that she wanted a governess for her little granddaughter, aged ten, and though fifty pounds was rather more than she had intended giving, she would not mind it, if I could teach music much above the average, and had a good accent both in French and German, was thoroughly ladylike and good-tempered, and if my references were unexceptionable.

"It is more like the sort of thing you want than any of the others," exclaimed Lady Sarah. "Look, Mrs. Sterling, handwriting and style all betoken a lady."

My mother agreed with her, and we handled the note with deep interest as we passed it from one to another.

"Davenel," repeated our visitor, "Davenel—that name rings familiarly in my ears." Then she flung herself back in her chair, diving into the past with eyes half closed. "I have it," she exclaimed, with animation. "When I was quite a girl, a Mr. Davenel used to come a great deal to my father's house; he was then unmarried, very gentlemanly, not very clever, rather feeble—nay, decidedly very feeble, little or no moral backbone in his composition. We girls used to make jokes about him in the schoolroom, and quiz his broad northern accent. Ah! it must be the same man. He was heir to a very large but very encumbered property. Soon after we knew him he married a woman with a great deal of money, and then I don't seem to remember much more about him.

"She was a strong-minded woman I fancy, but I don't think I ever saw her. I used to hear that she worried the tenants and people on his property

to an extent almost unbearable, by over-interference. But it must be thirty-five years ago, and more, since they married, so no doubt age has toned her down, as it tones most of us. I think I remember hearing something about a daughter of these Davenels, who married and died rather suddenly a few years after. No doubt this granddaughter is her child. But it is all very confused in my mind, for Mrs. Davenel, evidently the master-will, never cared to come to London, and Northshire was quite out of our acquaintance beat. Still I do think, dear Mrs. Sterling, things look on the whole promising. It is very hard for you to send your Muriel from you; but as she must go, it is best it should be among people whom we know something about, and who are people of condition, as these undoubtedly are."

My mother, however, shrank at first from this portrait of Mrs. Davenel, which certainly presented itself to us somewhat unpleasingly. "But after all," she said, "my girl cannot expect everything *couleur de rose*, nor must she hope for the warm kindliness of home life; so if Mrs. Davenel be only just, and fairly considerate, a little hardness can be borne. I agree with you, Lady Sarah, this situation sounds promising; but I would like to know more about the family, the way they live, even what their

religious views are. I do think we ought to find out more. Perhaps you will say it is for Mrs. Davenel to be particular, and not for us. It is the governess who usually gives references, but is not supposed to need them. Still, my daughter is very precious to me, so I must know more about these Davenels before I let her go to them."

"So you shall," said Lady Sarah. "I will let you know to-morrow; for, curiously enough, I am dining out to-night where I shall meet our archdeacon fresh from that part of Northshire; he is sure to know about these people; their religious tenets, as beseems his cloth, will be no doubt engraven on his mind. I will pick his brains for your benefit. To-morrow will be plenty of time for your answer, will it not?"

"Yes, that it will," said my mother gratefully. "I can never thank you enough for your kindness."

"Pooh, nonsense," said Lady Sarah, rising to stop thanks than which nothing was more abhorrent to her, and grasping hurriedly at sundry properties belonging to us, which her dimness of vision led her to believe were the outer garments she had laid aside when she joined our conference. In the midst of the small confusion attendant on setting her to rights, she turned to my mother, saying:

"Have you thought of what references to send, in case Muriel thinks of going to the Davenels?"

"Yes, I have," answered my mother. "I suppose a letter from Mr. Leslie will do?"

"Ah! yes, quite right, a clergyman's reference is always very good; but would it not be well in this instance to back it up by another?" Here she stopped, then, "Dear Mrs. Sterling," she added abruptly, and as abruptly nearly crushed our small cat, as she unexpectedly sat down in the easy-chair which was pussy's throne, and from which the poor little thing only escaped, feebly whining, as by a hair's breadth from annihilation—"Dear Mrs. Sterling," she repeated, after she had recovered the dismay this small incident caused her, "will you let me help you in this?" Lady Sarah put on the almost suppliant tone with which she always entreated people to let her assist them. "Enclose Mr. Leslie's letter by all means to Mrs. Davenel, but will you allow me to write to her myself as well? My dear," she went on, laying her hand on my mother's arm, "this stupid handle to my name has but small value in your or in my eyes; but I know it weighs something with the world; so if you will allow me to write all I can say about dear Muriel, it will, I think, start her on a better footing in the new life which awaits her."

My mother felt the real kindness of the offer, and accepted it readily. I do not think I was ever as enthusiastic about Lady Sarah as was Lottie, who, I suppose, liked her because her brusquerie was such a contrast to her own calm; but now I felt I loved her, not so much even for her kindness, as for the tact with which she showed it.

Why is it that some people's kindnesses hurt one? They may be overpoweringly good and conscientious, may wear themselves out striving to help others, yet we shrink from the wounds their want of tact leads them to inflict. It must be because they do not recognise enough the need for humility in serving. It would be a good plan for the helpers of the world to realise more what a privilege is theirs; to feel how hard it is for those who are helped to submit cheerfully to obligations. I think if benefactors would try to put themselves in the place of those who have the trial of receiving, instead of the happiness of giving, the pleasure on both sides would be much enhanced, while the bond of brotherhood would remain intact, and not be broken as it so often is.

Lady Sarah's sympathy did us great good; and when, by-and-by, she added some both useful and pretty things, which were beyond our means, to my outfit, we only felt glad and not humbled to

receive from one who seemed to think that it was she who was served when she conferred kindness on us.

The next morning brought our great lady to us soon after breakfast. "It is all right, Mrs. Sterling," she said joyfully. "The Davenels bear a high character in their neighbourhood, are strict in attendance at church, and all that sort of thing. I don't fancy she is much liked, though she does a great deal for the poor; but he is a great favourite, though too weak and dependent on her to have the influence he ought to have. I suppose you will write to-day to Mrs. Davenel, and I will also, if you wish it."

Of course we said we should write, and would be glad if she would also.

"Very good," was the response. "Now I must be off, I have half a hundred places to go to before lunch, so good-bye, my dears." Our busy fine lady kissed us warmly, and bustled out, leaving quite a little breeze behind her from her sudden entry and exit.

When I looked at my dear mother, her eyes were full of tears and she could not speak.

"Is it not good news, little mother? Surely you must be satisfied with what promises so well."

"Yes, satisfied, of course; but I am weak and foolish. I almost hoped to hear there was some objection, so that I might keep you longer at home.

Forgive my weakness, love. When I see you so brave I am ashamed of myself. I think it is easier to do, than to let others do for us. Every trouble that may be coming to you, will be very hard for me to bear, because you will be bearing it for me. But I must not be stupid any longer."

So brushing away her tears, my mother set to work, helping me to write to Mrs. Davenel. In due time came the answer. Mrs. Davenel was satisfied with all she had heard, and only trusted I should justify the unusually high testimonials she had received, in which sentiments I agreed, for my heart quaked when I thought it very likely I might not do so.

I was to go to The Chase in ten days, as her granddaughter had been some weeks without lessons; clear directions were enclosed about my journey, also a cheque sent for the expenses thereof. Then came the masculine signature, "Katherine Davenel," and so ended the letter.

My fate was now settled, and we had nothing to do but make my few preparations, and the best and happiest of the short time left to us before I must leave my dear home for a very uncertain future.

CHAPTER IV.

LEAVING HOME.

How quickly those days at Durnford passed, and how much there was to do in them; such patching, mending, and furbishing up of my modest wardrobe, such good-byes to friends whom I should not see again till Christmas, for I could not reasonably expect a holiday till then. I received so many kindly gifts that our maid Susan declared it was almost like a wedding, only there was no "groom." I must not forget my farewells to my poorer friends who had known me from childhood. Some of them were indignant that their "Miss Muriel" should go out to "service," as they phrased it. Others took a more romantic view of the matter, prophesying I should return among them by-and-by with a tall handsome husband by my side. One old dame

thought it was well that I should go farther afield for success in the matrimonial ventures, which the poor think should engross all young ladies.

"You know, bairn," she said, "you have been junketing about these three years past, and you are still Miss Muriel, and now Miss Lottie is grown up, she with her pretty face will put you out." Then, fearing she had hurt my feelings, she added: "Not but what you have a nice little face of your own, with a pretty glint in your eyes; Miss Lottie is more for show, but you are good for wear."

How we laughed at this at home, and thought a schoolroom was not a very likely place for the picking up husbands, who do not as a rule spring up in such a monotonous uneventful soil.

There was a good deal of pain though in all these last words; but perhaps I felt the most the farewell to every favourite walk and outdoor haunt. I began to realise that it could never be the same Muriel who would again revisit them; that possibly teaching, always teaching for most of my life, must infallibly rub the freshness out of me, must graft in its place the indefinable cut-and-dried governess manner, which so often comes to those poor victims to high-pressure education. But as much as possible I kept all depression to myself,

determining I would not sadden the two who I knew would miss me so dreadfully.

The last night came. We sat round our small supper-table with a little of the feeling of criminals who are partaking of their last repast previous to their execution; and, indeed, this might be called a social execution in my young life.

You mothers, whose daughters only leave you for one pleasant visit after another, where over-spoiling is the only thing you fear for them, think what it would be to send your darlings out among strangers, who may be duty kind to them, but may not even be that; think what it would be to send them to unknown houses, where they must learn to put a restraint on their natural liveliness, must affect a stillness and demureness foreign to their young natures; think of all the daily monotonous drudgery of teaching these young governesses have to undergo, the caprices they may be subject to, the uncertainty whether they will give satisfaction; think what it would be to know that if your girls were not strong, still they must struggle on with their work, and you cannot be near them. I believe if you well-to-do mothers would realise all this and many other things besides, you would understand what I saw my own dear mother was feeling during that last sad little evening meal, as she pressed

me to eat the small dainty prepared, making the while a feint of enjoying it herself which was the veriest sham possible. Lottie made no pretence at anything, but just looked as forlorn as she felt.

"We shall be the dolefullest twain in the world, till we get used to your loss, Muriel," at last she exclaimed. "It is not that you are perfect," she resumed, with the peculiar frankness with which sisters discuss sisters. "You have often worried me to death by your over-activity, your restlessness, and that provoking early rising which sets you on such a pinnacle of superiority and conceit over others; but—but you are a cosy little body, so good-humoured, and merry, and—and," here she choked, and finally burst into tears, gasping, "I hate your turning into a horrid old governess, I shall never like it, never."

My mother and I were dreadfully concerned when Lottie broke down like this. She was not strong, and our doctor said must not be allowed to fret. I almost went on my knees to beseech her forgiveness for going out as a governess and so distressing her. At last we soothed her, and persuaded her to go to bed and forget her sorrows in sleep. Then we returned to the parlour, and there by the fire, my mother spoke to me as only a loving

good mother can speak to a child whom she is sending into an untried life, an unknown future. She gently reminded me of the faults I must try to check, and begged me not to be on the look-out, as so many foolish governesses were, for offences, where, perhaps, none might be meant. If Mrs. Davenel was a little hard, as we had reason to fear she was, I must remember I was very young, that for every reason it became me to obey her; and, above all, to show no anger when found fault with.

"You know, dear, though good-tempered, you are sometimes hasty," she added, gently.

I will not repeat more of the good loving words said to me that night, though they comforted and strengthened me unspeakably. I was very anxious to do right in the new life before me; yet, oh! how every bit of me shrank from it, and how I needed the help I was now receiving.

At last mother refused to let me sit up longer. "Remember, love, the long journey to-morrow."

Truly it was a long journey. Ay, and a difficult one for a girl who had never travelled alone before; indeed, had hardly ever travelled before at all. The nearest station was some miles from Durnford, and my train left at seven; so a very early start was needful. It was a cross-country affair, so there were

two or three weary changes and waitings, and slow trains to submit to, making it impossible for me to arrive at Compton before the evening; and then, as I understood from Mrs. Davenel's letter, I had still a drive of some miles before arriving at The Chase. My grief at leaving home prevented the extreme dread with which this long lonely day would otherwise have inspired me. My mother disliked much my travelling alone, but what was the use of saying anything? What would be thought quite indecorous for the young daughter of rich parents, who of course goes nowhere without fitting escort, was a matter of course for one who had to earn her bread, so we scarcely referred to what we so disliked.

I could not sleep much that night, but towards morning I forgot myself for a short while as the most distressing dreams haunted me. I was starting on my journey without luggage, and then turned back to find it still all unpacked; then, oh horror of horrors! I saw I had only my night-dress on, and how could I show myself at the booking-office at Galton and ask for a ticket with no more on than that? Somehow this difficulty seemed to be overcome, in the inscrutable way peculiar to dreams, for I stepped into the train and found myself at the Compton station; I knew it was Compton for its name was

inscribed in red flaring letters all over the platform. Nobody seemed to mind the night-dress, but thought it all right. Then I was in a baker's cart, our own Durnford baker; very cold with the thin night-dress flapping round me, but talking affably to the baker as we drove up to a house bigger than any I had ever seen before, with myriads of windows all lit up and dazzling me. I now found myself in a room all hung with scarlet, where a very hideous hunchbacked old woman met me, and this was Mrs. Davenel, who, eyeing me with great disgust (perhaps no wonder, considering my airy garb), said I was too small and untidy to suit, and told me: "It is time to get up, dear." And then I woke to see dear mother standing by my bedside with a candle flaring in my eyes. It was of course her voice which had mingled itself with my dreams.

"Get up now, mother?" I cried, rubbing my eyes. "Why, it is still dark."

Somehow early rising did not commend itself so much to me as usual on that black morning in my destiny.

"I fear you must," said mother, as she gave me a loving kiss. "I do not want you to have a hurried breakfast, and you know you must start very early. I will now go and see that all is comfortable for you."

Oh ! that horrid getting up, that miserable toilette by the flickering glare of a dim candle ! The weather, too, had changed during the night ; the beautiful spring warmth was gone, while a cold north-easter reigned in its stead. I am always unduly influenced by atmospheric impressions, so I now abandoned myself to the most gloomy forebodings. However, I tried to hide my wretchedness, and made heroic, though abortive, attempts to eat breakfast at that abnormal hour. It was too cold for Lottie to accompany me to the station—a disappointment for the poor child, who clung to me at the parting, promising amidst her sobs that she would be “less lazy, and help mother all she could.” Then my mother and I got into our village cab, the only one it possessed, and it was famed for its jolting, rattling, and draughty propensities, also was warranted not to go more than four miles an hour. Yet that morning I felt I loved it, loved even old Jem Jones the driver, whom it was so hard to make hear or understand. I thought no grand carriage at the big house I was going to could ever be as pleasant to me as this tumbledown old vehicle, in which we had had many a merry drive and happy talk.

To-day we spoke little, and then only the merest commonplaces ; but our hands were never unclasped,

while I could see by mother's still face and compressed lips how much she was enduring.

There was little or no stir at the station, the hour being very early, and only a few country people were going to market in the neighbouring town. I easily found a corner in a second-class compartment with dull but respectable fellow-travellers; then came the last words, the last kiss, and—well, when the train started and I caught a last glimpse of that dear face, I felt almost glad that the parting was over, so painful was it. I now turned my own face well into my window, seemingly absorbed in admiration of a perfectly flat and hideous landscape, while I gave myself up to the relief of a good big cry, which had been pent up in me for days and days, and now at last got vent. When I had wept out all the tears there were in me, for that while at least, I roused myself and was ever so much better. There was no bitterness in my trouble, my tears were not those which scorch and sear the cheeks as they flow down, no pained or wounded feeling drew them from their source: I was just an unhappy girl, parting from all she most loved, and not at all liking or anticipating her future. Yet through all was the comfort that I was doing my best to help the dear ones I had left behind, so my trouble at worst was bearable.

I was naturally bright and hopeful, it was not my way to fret for long; so, drying my eyes, I looked round me for amusement, but finding none either within or without the carriage, took refuge from myself and my woes in a pleasant book.

There is not much to tell about my journey. Of course I was very nervous at the various changes, thinking I must infallibly lose my luggage, or myself, or both; also I left all my neat packets of eatables in the first waiting-room I had to tarry in, a noisy bell drawing me in a frenzy of haste from my shelter, in the fear lest I should miss my train. It would have been gratifying to a truly benevolent nature, which mine was not, to see the porter I had at last summoned courage to send for them, flourishing them vainly aloft as my train steamed from the station, and to know that his dinner would be ever so much the better for the loss of mine. It was truly selfish of me not to rejoice in his gain; but I was very healthily hungry, nor did a cup of weak tea and some chippy dry-as-dust sandwiches, eaten some hours afterwards in haste, at all appease my inward cravings.

It was not surprising that poor, tired, fretting, hungry nature proceeded to avenge herself by instituting in my weary brain sharp twinges, which warned

me a headache was impending—a malady fortunately rare with me; but especially to be dreaded now when I needed to be at my best to meet my unknown employers. The last three hours of my journey were the worst. The carriage was full, the windows tightly shut. This to a country girl, loving pure fresh air and breezes, was very terrible, and the close atmosphere soon told on my poor aching brow. At last I sat bolt upright, almost rigid with pain, no one noticing me much, fortunately, till an elderly man got in at a by-station, and sat next to me. He may have been a good well-meaning person; but he had gloomy religious opinions, which he evidently thought ought to be instilled in or out of season into those about him. He first began by stating generally to the assembled company that there had been terrible railway accidents lately—facts we already knew very well; then he enlarged on the horrors attending them, in crude yet graphic words. When he had reduced two or three women present to extreme terror, he began to deduce lessons from these accidents, telling us they should lead us to be always ready and prepared for God's vials of wrath, and then he quoted the most solemn texts with a curious sort of familiarity, as if they were his own ideas entirely. Even in the midst of the severe pain

which was dulling my intellect, I felt it was poor reasoning to suppose fear of danger only could lead us to better things ; nor did I think it was a healthy state of mind which would frighten people as he was doing. Finally he turned to me, seeing I was perhaps the youngest present.

“I hope you agree with me, miss, that even the young should always have their loins girded, their staves in their hands, and be ready for the dread summons to the awful tribunal?”

I opened my eyes for one moment, glanced at his thin, cadaverous, undertaker-looking physiognomy, shivered, and said :

“I beg your pardon, I have a bad headache and would rather not talk.”

I reclosed my eyes, but before doing so, saw a look of deep pity pass over his face—not for my pain, but for my mental darkness. I am sure he wished to expound to me further, for I flipped my eyelids a tiny bit open once or twice, and saw him ready to begin ; but each time he was checked by their reclosing. It is not, I suppose, easy for a man to address anyone who presents to him a blank face with eyelids glued together. He went on preaching for some time, getting few answers, till at last even he was weary, and we jolted on in welcome silence ; I,

almost wishing for one of those same accidents he so vividly portrayed, so that the train might stop and that painful vibration cease.

But in due course the longed-for sound came—"Compton! Compton!" bawled out by a porter, strongly accentuating the last syllable, after the manner of his kind. How thankfully I tumbled myself and my parcels out of our stuffy imprisonment! Compton was a dull-looking station. The immediate neighbourhood was flat; but some picturesque hills not far off, with the setting sun shining full on them, gave promise of greater beauty than appeared in the vicinity.

I stood on the platform, surrounded by my boxes. My first impulse was to bare my head to the cold wind which came sweeping down the line. I still remember the relief this gave me. I then turned to the porter, asking: "Has anything come to meet me from Mrs. Davenel's?"

"Yes, ma'am," promptly replied the man. "The groom and dog-cart were here half-an-hour ago, but your train is late, so he went into the town, but said he would not be long."

"How far is it to The Chase?" was my next query.

"A matter of ten mile."

Then he moved off, leaving me to my own meditations, till at last the tardy groom appeared on the scene, and informing me the cart would be sent for the big things in the morning, put me and my small effects into a high-looking vehicle, less familiar to my southern eyes than if I had been a dweller of the North Countree, and off we went at a good pace; which, however, had to be slackened as we approached the hilly district. I was very weary and tired, my spirits at their lowest ebb. I leant back with a hopeless foolish longing that the drive could but end in home and a loving welcome.

The very thought of Durnford brought a gulp in my throat, and dreading another shower of tears, a luxury my eyes must not now give themselves, I made a few timid remarks to the man to divert my ideas. Though quite respectful he was very taciturn, so we soon lapsed into silence. I must have fallen into a doze when the friendly darkness screened me, for I remember nothing more till I was roused by a sound quite new to me, a surging booming noise, with regular rise and fall like a musical rhythm. It was now pitch-black darkness, and we were creeping slowly uphill.

"What's that?" I exclaimed.

"What's what, ma'am?" answered the groom.

"Why, that curious noise."

"That! why that's the sea, of course."

"The sea!" I cried. "Is The Chase near the sea?"

"Yes," said the man almost contemptuously at my ignorance. "It is on the sea, I may say. We have only half-a-mile more now; this is the elm avenue which leads up to the house."

It might have been an avenue of wellingtonias for aught I could see just then, but this sound which came more and more distinctly to my ears filled me with delight, the sea being to me an unknown and always much-longed for pleasure.

True, I had come from the Mauritius in my early childhood, but of that I had no recollection. The thought that on the next morning I should look on this wonder cheered me immensely, as we drew near a huge pile of building veiled in darkness, with all its windows no doubt carefully shuttered, for only here and there did a stray gleam of light peep out to show it was inhabited.

CHAPTER V.

ARRIVAL AT THE CHASE.

As soon as the carriage stopped a wide door was flung open, and a soft, pretty, glowing light revealed to me a grand flight of steps leading up into a spacious hall, which impressed me as one of the most beautiful I had ever seen. It was entirely of oak, very dark oak, exquisitely carved wherever carving could be put, with delicate pillars, giving elegance to what might otherwise have been too heavy and massive. Round it was a wide gallery, into which most of the upper rooms opened ; at the end facing the entrance portico was a huge and very old-fashioned chimney, and on the hearth burnt a monster wood fire, whose cheerful blaze and crackling gave a peculiar look of welcome to the place. In looking round, the eye glanced with pleasure on vivid bits of colouring, soft Persian rugs of varied hues most charmingly blended, skins of

beasts, old armour, curiously inlaid cabinets, beautiful stands of flowers—all and every one lending their attraction to the scene. I forgot myself and my nervousness as I stood gazing round me, when an individual in plush stepped forward and took from me the wraps with which I was encumbered, while an impressive, fatherly-looking, almost aristocratic person, the chief butler I presume, bade me follow him—a command I obeyed in all meekness.

We turned out of the hall, and passing through one or two corridors, at last stopped before a door, which he opened, announcing my name with due emphasis. Ah! how dusty, shabby, insignificant I felt as I walked up a spacious brilliantly-lighted drawing-room to where a small group of people sat round the fire. A tall lady rose at my entrance, and stepping about two feet in advance, stretched out a hand, with which she gave me a chilly shake. She was very handsome, had regular features, with a wonderfully clear complexion, and large hazel eyes undimmed by age, the beautiful snow-white hair lying in silver braids beneath the delicate lace cap, the black velvet robe clinging in pall-like folds round her stately but not graceful form. Yes, that was the peculiar thing about Mrs. Davenel, she possessed beauty of face and form far above the average; but the face was

displeasing from its hard cold expression, the form unattractive from its singular awkwardness and stiffness. Of course I did not see all this so clearly at first; but even in that first greeting a something lacking in this noble-looking woman, a sense of discord and want of harmony, jarred on me.

"You have had a long journey, Miss Sterling," she said, in a cold unsympathising voice. "Your train is very late, you should have been here at eight, and it is now past nine;" this was added in an aggrieved tone, as if it were my fault. Then, as if forcing herself to remember a social duty scarcely needed in my case, she introduced hurriedly: "Mr. Davenel; Miss Davenel; my son, Captain Davenel," and motioned me to a seat. I wondered then that the poor governess was not allowed to seek her own room at once that night, instead of being introduced in travel-worn garb into the drawing-room; but months afterwards I found out that the son, whose will was law with his mother, had insisted on my being had in for inspection, for the fun of the thing.

They all struck me as a wonderfully, I may say appallingly, tall thin family, as, like telescopes unfolding themselves, they rose and bowed to me. The only warmth manifested in this greeting to a weary stranger came from the master of the house,

whose kindly genial face and pleasant voice cheered me inexpressibly. He stepped forward, shaking me heartily by the hand as he said :

“ Bless me, how very tired you must be ! I hate travelling myself, it always gives me a headache, with its abominable jolting, and jarring, and stuffy smells. I hope you have not a headache ; though, upon my word, you look as if you had.”

I was obliged in a feeble crushed voice to plead guilty to a slight one.

“ Dear me, what a pity ! ” ejaculated the kindly old man ; “ what a pity ! Brandy and seltzer always cures mine ; you must have some at once.”

He was proceeding to ring the bell ; but in a bustling, nervous, hurried manner, as if he were not quite sure he might be allowed to do it, when the same cold voice which had first greeted me arrested him in his movement.

“ You need not trouble yourself, Edward ; no doubt supper is ready in the schoolroom for Miss Sterling. I do not suppose she would care for brandy.”

“ No, indeed,” I said, “ a cup of tea would——” be much nicer, I was going to add, but, blushing crimson, I stopped, seeing from Mrs. Davenel’s frown that it was not for me to suggest.

A slight pause ensued, which was broken by a

the family. So it came about that I addressed her first. I ventured to ask my pupil's age and name.

"Her name is Katherine Stewart, but most of us call her Kitty for short; she is just ten years old. You will find her a good little girl, and if she takes to you at all she will take to you very much indeed."

Miss Davenel's voice was the prettiest thing about her; it was sweet and low, with a note of sadness running through it which gave it interest.

"I do hope she will like me," I responded. "I am fond of children, but this is the first time I have gone out teaching. I am rather young, and may not manage well. I may not be firm enough."

Something in her kindly voice had impelled this small confidence on my part as we paced side by side along the crimson-carpeted gallery.

"Please don't try to be too firm; Kitty gets any amount of that already. Indeed, she will be the better for a little petting and spoiling," Miss Davenel answered, giving a little sigh. Then pushing open a green-baize door, she informed me the schoolroom was in the oldest part of the house, some little way from the gallery we were just leaving. "I always think," she added, "that the old part of the house is by far the pleasantest. When I came out I was quite sorry to be promoted to the company rooms."

We walked down a long passage only partially lit, and entered a room not large, but cosy-looking, with panelled walls and deep-red curtains. We heard here the booming sound of the waves most clearly.

"I hope you don't mind that noise," remarked Miss Davenel. "The last governess complained dreadfully of it; but there is no avoiding it, for the schoolroom abuts on a crag almost overhanging the sea; so you can't get away from it."

"I love the sound already," I answered; "though it is quite new to me."

"What! You have never been near the sea!" said Miss Davenel, in a languid voice, raising her eyebrows, or the place where they ought to have been, with a calm surprise. "Well, you will have enough of it here. On winter nights it is too deafening. Your room opens into the schoolroom on this side, and Kitty's room is on the other. The supper is laid," she said, glancing at the table, "so I will just ring for the maid who waits on you and Kitty, and she shall bring you tea if you fancy it. Now I will bid you good-night, and trust your head will be better to-morrow. You look rather bad now."

She shook hands not unkindly when the maid entered, and then left the room with her usual air of quiet apathy. The maid, who rejoiced in the name

of Mercy, was a brisk wholesome-looking young woman, very inclined to be civil. I declined anything more than tea, being too tired to eat; and then, availing myself of her assistance to get out a few things, was glad to lay my weary self on the old-fashioned but comfortable-looking bed, which seemed to me more inviting than anything else at that moment. I was so worn out that I neither thought of the present nor dreaded the future. I only sent a loving thought and prayer to the dear ones far away, and sank into a profound and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST MORNING.

I SLEPT till an unusually late hour the next morning, but was at last awakened by the fierce noise of the wind as it swept raging round the house, accompanied by the dull roar of the sea. As soon as I realised where I was I jumped out of bed, and ran to the window, flinging back the curtains, that I might as soon as possible look on this wonder which lay surging beneath me. I suppose I shall never forget the impression which that first view of the sea gave me, as it lay a mighty living volume of water beneath my gaze. A great storm was raging, the ocean one boiling cauldron of foam, the waves rearing their crests on high in seething masses. I could see no land anywhere, nothing but the turbulent sea. I stood there awed, fascinated, taken out of my poor self, my whole nature transported for the time into the

great immensity before me. At last I was almost terrified; for though I was a great height above this stupendous scene, still it seemed as if these monster waves must draw me, the room, the very house even, into their deep abysses, as the spray came thundering up even to the window where I stood. By-and-by, as I became used to the grandeur, I was able to take in the smaller details: the beautiful rocks, now dimly visible through the foam, now hidden beneath the huge billows, which came crashing with booming noise over them; the sea-gulls flying low down, dipping their soft wings into the ocean, as if revelling in the whirlpool of noise, as if storm, discord, and fierce agitation were their natural elements.

It was difficult to tear myself away from the window which opened such a new and magnificent world to my delighted eyes; but I must dress in haste. Mercy had warned me that prayers would be in the hall at a quarter to nine, and that her mistress was very angry if anyone were late; and then had kindly volunteered to come and show me the way down.

I had just finished arranging my plain serge dress—my pet one, because I fancied it fitted me best—with its neat collar and cuffs, when she

appeared, and made me follow her into the long, rather ugly passage through which I had walked on the previous night, and from whence we descended by a narrow staircase which led to the hall; Mercy pointing to the door I was to go in by, while she joined a file of domestics, waiting to make their entrance another way. The hall looked even more imposing by daylight; but I had scarcely time to notice it, as I timidly joined the small group standing by the glowing fire, most of whom I had seen the night before. Captain Davenel, as I afterwards found, was the one happy individual in that rigid household who could snap his fingers with impunity at all rules and regulations. The mistress of the mansion stood motionless by a carved ebony reading-stand, from whence she had evidently every intention of expounding to us. Her dress in the daytime was characterised by almost meagre simplicity; straight lines of black stuff clung round her, the sweeping majestic train which appertained to the evening garb having given place to an all-round-about short skirt, which looked almost ridiculous on her great length, giving her the effect of an exceedingly tall, old-looking little girl.

She was a woman who saw well, perhaps for their comfort too well, to the ways of the house-

hold, prying, as was her nature, into the smallest details; so her morning attire looked, as it was meant to look, like business.

Miss Davenel wore the palest lack-lustre shade of gray, with light-blue ribbons fluttering here and there. (Why is it that pale washed-out women will always affect light dabby tints, which only add to their hueless aspect?) She stood as close to the fire as she could get; and near her was a little girl, tall for her age, very pretty, with a sweet sensitive face, and a mass of golden hair falling in profusion round her shoulders.

Mr. Davenel bustled forward, asking how I had slept, and if my head were better. I had just time to exchange salutations with the others and be introduced to my pupil, when a long row of servants marched in, and took their places according to their rank in the household, on two long benches, placed for them at a discreet distance from us.

It seemed strange to see Mrs. Davenel step behind the reading-desk instead of her husband, but he had learnt thankfully to take the second place. I wondered whether he had ever in the past struggled for pre-eminence in this or any other way. However, whether he had or not, he evidently now found his truest peace in submission to the higher power. That

morning we had a fierce denunciatory chapter in the Old Testament, given to us in a high-pitched voice, and with its threatenings well emphasized.

I sat opposite a small kitchen or scullery maid, who looked new and nervous, perhaps, like me, just imported into the house. I marked with mingled pity and amusement how the poor child visibly trembled as the accents of the hard voice rolled over her head. We then knelt down. The prayers being mostly from the Prayer Book were familiar and welcome; and though I had a sort of feeling, from the way she expressed it, that Mrs. Davenel was calling us names when she affirmed we were "miserable sinners," and that she had no participation in our guilt, or ever could have, still, the very repetition, however unmelodious, of the beautiful loved words did me good, perhaps checked in me the fault of over-criticism—one of the faults my mother had cautioned me against.

When prayers were over, we marched into a small but very pretty breakfast-room, opening into a lovely garden, with a side-view of the sea, where the family generally breakfasted when no guests were staying at The Chase. We were a very taciturn quintette, the little girl giving me furtive glances from time to time, but not daring to speak. Mr. Davenel read us small

scraps from the newspaper, till his wife told him she had a headache, and his voice made it worse.

Anastasia—I beg her pardon, Miss Davenel—was listless and indifferent, scarcely touching any of the good things before her. She seemed cold, and indeed it was a bitter morning. She had now huddled round her a beautiful soft Indian shawl, which became her, inasmuch as it gave amplitude to her too lath-like form.

“Keep those things hot for Captain Davenel, Hughes,” at last said Mrs. Davenel, turning to the portly butler; then addressing me she remarked: “I see you have finished, Miss Sterling, so you and Katherine can go to the schoolroom, where I will join you in half an hour. You need not begin any lessons till I come.”

I gladly made my escape; this, my first experience of an unhomelike family, was most distasteful to me. I thought with longing regrets of the pleasant morning chatter, and discussions of letters, and the newspaper, which used to enliven our simple breakfast-table at Durnford.

Outside the door we met Captain Davenel. His niece sprang towards him, giving him the heartiest kisses, with an amount of effusion I had not expected to see in her. He half laughed as he caressed her,

then stretching out his hand to me, observed : " Good morning. It has been a wild night, and is a wilder morning. Did the wind disturb you ? but I scarcely think it can have done so, for you look as fresh as possible."

I told him I had heard nothing of the storm, I had slept so well.

I thought as I turned from him, that he could scarcely have given me the same answer, so haggard and worn did he look. He was, I suppose, a handsome man : a true Davenel in tallness and thinness ; but there was a discontented cynical look in his face, which I could not like—which made me for a long time uncertain as to whether or no he was ridiculing me. He looked very delicate, indeed was now home on sick leave, and there was some talk of his leaving the service because of ill-health. Being the one person on earth whom Mrs. Davenel loved, the little world of his own home bowed down before him, ministering to his every whim and caprice. Sometimes he filled the house with guests, when gaiety would reign supreme ; at other times, as now, he preferred solitude, would shut himself up moodily in his own rooms, reading, or pretending to read, smoking enormously, and resenting any intrusion. He repaid his mother's devotion coldly. When I knew her

better I often pitied the poor proud woman, who, rejecting the affection of others, lavished the whole strength and passion of her nature on one who valued little the love which was at his beck and call; and who, as I, alas! knew too well in later days, only craved for that which was difficult, if not impossible, of attainment. But this is anticipating: only when one is writing of what is all past, it is difficult to keep things in their exact sequence.

The schoolroom had the same glorious view of the sea as my room, but Kitty Stewart shuddered when she looked on the, to me, exhilarating scene.

"I do dislike it when it is stormy; how I wish grandmamma would not have the schoolroom here. I always think we shall one day be blown away," said the child, turning her back on the window and crouching near the fire. I laughed, and said the house seemed big and strong enough to defy any storm.

"Oh, but you don't know! Our three rooms are built out over the crag, and there are no rooms under them. The walls are thick or it would be dreadfully cold; it is as bad as living at sea."

"How curious to build rooms out in that way," I remarked, taking the tiny cold hand in mine, as the

child knelt near me, and beginning to warm it between my own.

Something in the action made Kitty (as I called her when alone, though to please Mrs. Davenel it was Katherine before strangers) look up into my eyes. I don't know what the child saw there, but she lifted up her face and kissed me. Ah! my dear little Kitty, you did not know the good you did that morning to the lonely stranger when you gave her that loving kiss. I put my arm round her, drawing her close to me, and, telling her I wished to be friends with her, wished that she should love me. I won a good piece of her little heart that morning.

"You are very different from the rest of them," said the child, with a sort of quaintness lonely children so often employ in their talk; "they always said they hoped I should be good and do my lessons well, and never said anything about love, or being friends."

"Who were they?" I asked, smiling.

"Oh, the other governesses, to be sure. I have had so many of them, you know, and they and granny never got on, so they were always going. I could not grow to care for them much, still it was so weary to be always changing. You will try and stay, won't you?"

I promised her I would try, and then asked again about the rooms, feeling it was best not to encourage too much confidence, at any rate at first. The child was quite chatty now. She drew a little stool close to my chair, hoping "granny would be ever so long before she came," and then proceeded to tell me that we were in the oldest part of the house—that these three rooms had been built ever so many hundred years ago, by an eccentric old ancestor, who, at war with mankind, purposely built over the crag so that he might see no human habitation from his windows, no land even, nothing but sea everywhere. It was from that humble commencement that the house had grown, bit by bit, till it had become the present stately pile.

"There is one very nice thing here," said Kitty, "the window opens on to a balcony—see!" and she drew me to it.

I saw a widish terrace, carefully protected by rugged stone balustrades, which ran the full length of our three rooms.

"It is so nice here in fine weather; we can sit out, and it goes down by stairs to the gardens on the south side of the house." We were still looking at it when Mrs. Davenel entered.

"Katherine, go to your aunt, and stay with her till I send for you," she at once said; then, as the

little girl left the room, the old lady—if so soft an epithet as old could be applied to one whose rigidity of backbone was truly appalling—sat bolt upright in the only easy, or rather uneasy, chair our somewhat ascetic schoolroom afforded.

The half-hour which ensued was a mental ordeal not easily to be forgotten. First came a searching inquisition into all my antecedents. I felt that even a natural desire to know all she could fairly gather about her granddaughter's governess, did not justify the impertinence of some of her queries. She dragged out of me by piecemeal as much as she could about my parents, and how much we knew of Lady Sarah, who had written to her respecting me; and when, in course of questioning, I mentioned I had one sister, and on being asked, "Was she like me?" replied, "Oh no! my sister is tall and very pretty," she coolly remarked:

"Perhaps it is as well you should have come and not your sister, though you are scarcely tall enough to inspire dignity or obedience; but pretty girls so often give themselves airs, and are troublesome."

How furious I felt at this, but I remembered the home exhortations, and kept, I hope, a gentle face and demeanour. She investigated so closely that at last I felt uncertain how far my duty required me

to be communicative; but I thought I might keep the "curate" episode, though it was with difficulty I did so, out of the account she made me give her of my hitherto prosaic life.

I afterwards heard that Mrs. Davenel's curiosity about her neighbours' affairs was one reason why she was so little liked. She was accustomed to reign paramount, at home and in the neighbourhood, and thought she had a perfect right to pry into other people's affairs. She did not love reading, or interest herself in politics; all large topics were mostly tabooed in the family circle, as unless people agreed exactly with her, she was much irritated; but she loved much to discuss, and not always goodnaturedly, all gossip which came within her ken.

When she had tortured me sufficiently, and my cheeks were flushed, my pulse beating double-quick time from repressed annoyance, she began about my pupil, speaking always in the same hard dry voice.

"I wish you and my granddaughter to breakfast and lunch with us, for I consider that she will thus better acquire good and easy manners. Tea and supper you will have here. I am very particular as to punctuality, any divergence from which I regard as direct disobedience to my orders. I wish there to

be two walks a day of an hour each; if it is absolutely too stormy, as it is this morning, to admit of outdoor exercise, you will play instead at battledore and shuttlecock in the corridor. Katherine says she is tired of the game, but that is no reason for discontinuing it; nay, rather the contrary, for it will now serve the purpose of mental discipline as well as of bodily exercise. Lessons begin at half-past seven in summer, and at eight in the winter."

Mrs. Davenel then proceeded to unfold a long list of studies, in which the pressure of education seemed to weigh much too heavily on the delicate-looking little girl, in whom I already felt a kindly interest. It was not for me however to remonstrate, when rules and systems were laid before me involving much too large a portion of the day, and leaving too small a margin for the healthful recreation, so much more necessary than learning for one so young as my small pupil. I then and there resolved within my own mind that I would ameliorate and soften these rigid rules as far as I conscientiously could, and a warm feeling stole into my heart when I thought how much I might do to brighten and cheer the life and existence, which for a time at least were entrusted to me.

The latter part of the conversation was conducted

in French; the old lady being evidently very bent on gauging my capabilities in that line, and being as evidently somewhat proud of the certainly fluent though rather ungrammatical way in which she spoke her French "like a native" (of Britain).

I passed the examination to her satisfaction, having indeed advertised my few talents most truly. I hoped now that the conversation was ended; but no, the worst was to come.

"You will not join us in the evenings, ordinarily," she remarked coldly. "Katherine comes in to dessert every night, though I think it a most foolish plan, and most injurious to the health, eating trash at that hour; but it is her uncle's wish, and so it is done. You can have that time to yourself, unless we have visitors, and then I expect you to come into the drawing-room after nine and spend an hour or so there. You have of course evening dresses with you?—if not, you must buy one or two."

I assured her those articles of toilette were included in my modest wardrobe, and wondered within myself whether she supposed I had hitherto lived among barbarians; but the rich Mrs. Davenel imagined, no doubt, that poor people admitted of no refinements in their lives.

"That's well," she answered. "I am glad your music is spoken of as good, but I should like to hear you play now, that I may judge of it."

This was terrible; I was not usually nervous in displaying my one decided accomplishment; but the going in cold blood to an unknown piano, the playing to that hard critical woman, made my very fingers tremble.

"My music is not unpacked yet," I faltered.

"Indeed!" (well emphasized). "Then you cannot play without book? I am sorry to hear it. I consider no one is a very profound lover of music, or can attain to any real excellence, who is always dependent on notes."

This put me on my mettle. Besides, playing from memory was always real enjoyment to me, the music before me often chaining the expression I endeavoured to give, the very turning over the pages making a break in the continuance of harmony.

I at once went to the piano; and, divining that this lady wished for no soft and subduing melody, in which all difficulties would apparently be merged in the exquisite simplicity of feeling, but that she would prefer a sort of finger gymnastic performance, I dashed into an involved fantasia of extreme execution, with an air, poor thing! much chopped up,

running through it. It was not the music I loved; but my mother had made me study this and a few like it, to please the "common ear." I found I had chosen wisely, for when it was concluded and I rose from the music-stool, I saw Mrs. Davenel was contented.

"You finger well, your execution is good," she commented.

I wondered she did not add: "And you make plenty of noise," as indeed I had, working off my irritation harmlessly that way.

"Of course you play for dancing," was the next remark. Did I not? Sundry impromptu dances flitted before my mind's eyes in which my feet and hands had been in almost equal requisition. I responded:

"Oh yes," and then cheerily, for the very touching a piano, the mere sound of music, never failed to brighten me; "I do like playing for dancing so much."

A frown on Mrs. Davenel's brow warned me as on the previous evening, that it was to be no question of likes or dislikes on my part while under her roof. I was simply paid to do as I was told, and no hired machine was less to be consulted than I.

"That is convenient," she said, rising from her chair. "Anastasia, I mean Miss Davenel, does not care for dancing; but sometimes when we have young people in the house Captain Davenel fancies a little in the evenings. I am glad that so good a mu—" Here she checked herself, then resumed—"I am glad that playing difficult music as you do, that you can also play dance music; the two do not often go together. I have now told you all I wish. You need have no lessons to-day, so that you may arrange your things; also study well the hours and rules I have given you; but you can show Katherine what lessons to learn in preparation. To-morrow you will begin regularly."

She was leaving the room, when I ventured to ask her at what hour the post went out.

"Every day at four. The letter-box is in the hall; but I sincerely trust you are not one of those women who are always scribbling. The last governess was always writing volumes, and neglecting her duty in consequence."

I said I wished to write to my mother that day, but that in future I would only write in the evenings when my work was done. Mrs. Davenel bowed her head stiffly in acquiescence, and removed from me her

chilly presence. The air seemed warmer after she was gone.

Perhaps I was a baby, but I could not help crying a little. One word of kindness to the young girl who had left her home for the first time, would have done her such infinite good, would have helped her so.

But I soon brushed away my tears, and sat down to my dear letter, making the very best of things for the two who would be so longing for the first tidings. As I wrote myself into good spirits, I felt there was not so very much to complain of after all. I was sure I should soon love my little pupil, and that teaching her would be a pleasure. I was in exceedingly comfortable quarters, and my beautiful surroundings were fully appreciated by me. When I thought I might have had to be governess to three or four perhaps uninteresting children, in some dingy back schoolroom in a dull London house, I felt my lot was quite a fortunate one. Indeed, I realised that Mrs. Davenel, and the cold unloving family circle which so oppressed me, were the only trials I could so far see looming in the horizon.

So I had plenty of reason for being quite sufficiently content; and after I had settled my few things

in the ample accommodation provided for them, I drew my chair to the window, and while awaiting the return of the little girl, I feasted my eyes on the glorious view before me, which unfolded to me such an ever-varied treasure of beauty and grandeur.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCERNING THE FAMILY.

I SHALL not say much about the first few weeks I spent at The Chase. Though every incident is vividly impressed on my mind, all being so new and strange to me, still it may not be interesting to others. I will therefore only glance at what occurred.

The child and I soon became firm friends, though there were many things in her I could not quite approve of, such as small underhand ways, deviations from truth, pleasure in concealments, combined with extreme dislike—though, from natural timidity, carefully hidden dislike—of her grandmother. All these were defects arising from injudicious training, from the frequent changes of governesses, from over-strictness, and the lack of that frank, open, yet firm kindness, which is the only way of winning the fixed love and obedience of children. I took my stand from

the first. I would not allow the slightest prevarication even, nor a word to be said against others. The little girl, seeing I practised what I preached, soon learnt entire trust in me. The love born of trust was not slow in coming, and then my task was quite easy. It was not difficult for me to love her: her faults were from bad management and not indigenous to the soil. She was not strong, and I soon saw that this keen northern air, which suited me so well, was often too trying for the delicate child. But the laws of health were not understood in this great house. Mrs. Davenel, always well herself, set down most ailments to affectation. Kitty's cough was a "stupid trick," her disinclination to go out in cold weather was only because she liked to disobey orders, her complaints of being "so tired," "her bones aching," and her shrinking from long walks, only laziness—so affirmed her grandmother. But I did not think so, and never blamed my pupil when she would coax her uncle into getting her small indulgences, which but for him would never have been granted, and which she really needed.

I supposed, I scarcely know why, that she was fatherless as well as motherless, therefore great was my surprise when one day, Kitty, after showing me the likeness of a sweet-looking woman, the young mother

whom she had lost, exclaimed: "Now I will show you dear father's portrait." I was regarding it with the half pathetic feeling with which we think of those who, taken early from this world, do not seem as if they had had their full allowance of life, when, to my astonishment she went on to say:

"Father has promised me such a much more beautiful likeness; it is to be ever so much bigger, and in a lovely carved frame. It is to be here by my birthday; I mean to hang it up in my bedroom. You must help me where to put it please."

I was so taken aback that, before I could stop myself, out came the words: "What, is your father alive?" Kitty opened her blue eyes to their fullest extent, and made answer, as if I ought to have known it:

"Why, of course!" he left England soon after dear mamma died. I scarcely remember him, but he writes me by every mail now I am big enough to read writing, such long nice letters telling me so many wonderful things; and I write to him, and no one, not even grandmamma herself, dares look at my letters. Father says he wants me—my real self—in them, so he does not mind bad grammar, or spelling, but just makes me say all I think. I shall tell him all about you, how kind you are, and how

I hope you will stay here. How could you think father was dead? Why I could not do without him."

She stooped, kissing passionately the portrait before her, the fervour with which she did it showing how the strongest feelings in that young heart were sent across the seas to the unknown but already dearly loved parent. I looked with great interest at Mr. Stewart's likeness; he was not handsome, indeed much the reverse, still he was not common-looking, and there was a touch of humour about the mouth, a kindly look in the dark eyes, an intelligence in the brow which redeemed the plainness of the features. It was difficult, however, to give it the praise Kitty claimed from all who looked at it. But I managed, without hopelessly perjuring myself, to satisfy her, and then, with glowing cheeks, she talked of him and of all the wonderful things he did in India, winding up with: "He is coming home in a few months, and I shall see him," which seemed to her the very acme of earthly felicity. Mr. Stewart, I felt, would indeed have to be an admirable Crichton if he were able to satisfy all his little daughter's requirements.

Once he was with her there would be nothing left to wish for. Everything that was unpleasant in her

life was to vanish at his approach ! "I shall be quite strong when father is home," she would say, nodding her head confidently. "I shall be happy always when he comes." There was something sad in witnessing this entire absolute faith, in an as yet unknown human being, and it spoke volumes for the loneliness of her life, this great absorption in this one glorious future which was coming to her. I was very glad that she should talk as much as she liked about her father, but I discouraged conversation about the people in the house, so it would have been long before I should have known much about them, had it not been for one of Lady Sarah's graphic epistles, which arrived before I had been many days at The Chase. She, very kindly, had found out all she could about the Davenels from different people, for, as she remarked : "One only blunders about a country till one knows the geography thereof ; and as all I tell you is public property, I am violating no confidence." She then told me much which I shall now relate, and the knowledge of which helped me, making me understand many things which might otherwise have puzzled me.

I was not very surprised to hear that Mrs. Davenel had not the good blood in her veins which her outwardly stately demeanour warranted. I had already

thought that her curiosity, so often bordering on impertinence, and the petty ways in which she manifested it, seemed very unsuited to the mistress of so great a place, nor did it look like one "to the manner born."

Her father was a nobody, who making a colossal fortune in trade, had raised himself into a very important somebody. He died when she was a young girl, leaving her one of the largest heiresses in England. Need I say that with her beauty and fortune, lovers and many came to woo, but with the perversity which attends such things, Katherine Merton fixed her affections on a man so great, that her money was indifferent to him. He was for a short while attracted by her good looks and worshipped at her shrine, but soon tired of the cramped, narrow mind, soon detected the imperious temper she scarcely hid even in those days. Her rage and mortification when he transferred his affections to another lady were beyond bounds. Her great pride enabled her to conceal, but I doubt if her heart, or vanity, or both, ever recovered the wound then received.

She was from that time a weary, dissatisfied, bitter woman. One thing she resolved on, and that was to marry soon, so that no one might suspect she cared; so, seeing in Mr. Davenel a weak man, easy to be

led, also knowing her fortune would so redeem his encumbered property that she could take her place among the first in the county, she accepted his proposals—proposals earnest and sincere on his part, for he loved her for herself alone.

She made but a poor return for the devotion he always showed her; and though he went on loving her—it being a safe and good habit, and his nature being singularly gentle and loving—still he was not a happy man, for he feared her violent and capricious moods, and dared not oppose her will in anything.

Her one longing was for a son, and her disappointment was intense when two girls arrived one after the other. It is said that on the occasion of each birth her rage was so great that she turned her face away, refusing to look at the child, and ordering her out of her sight; nor did she ever make a loving mother to either. At last her passionate desire was gratified, a boy was born, the heir to the vast possessions which her money had caused to be the noblest property in those parts. For a short time Katherine Davenel knew the meaning of the word happiness. Influenced by it, she so softened that her husband and children gladly basked in the unwonted sunshine; but this state of

peace did not last long; "my son," as she generally called him—as if Mr. Davenel were quite outside the affair altogether—was a delicate, sickly, fretful child, and the morbid intensity with which she showed her anxiety for him, made her a torment to herself and to those around her. She spoilt him to the utmost; at school his pocket-money was absurdly large, and favours were purchased for him beyond all other boys. In the crack cavalry regiment he elected to join he led the van in extravagance, till even his mother trembled at the large sums he demanded as a right. A severe illness checked him in his wild career; his weakly constitution could not stand the late hours and never-ending excitement. He loved himself very dearly; so his fears of a relapse made him more careful, and consequently he had of late spent less money, and led a quieter life. He cared far more for his father and sisters than for his mother, and thus was one never-ceasing misery to her; and though she gave way to him in everything the two did not get on happily together.

Indeed, it did seem hard that she should spend herself for naught. Perhaps her restlessness, even her incessant interference, was caused by the disappointment life had been to her. I used to wonder if she had had her heart's desire in the way of marrying the

man she loved, whether it would have made her a more lovable woman. It might have done so, but one cannot tell. Certainly one has often seen the most beautiful, the brightest natures, belonging to those upon whom stroke after stroke of affliction has fallen; but who having borne their crosses bravely, have learnt to possess their souls in patience. Whereas this poor woman had had but this one trial in her early life, and it seemed to have poisoned her whole nature; so I suppose she had really herself, her own selfish, jealous, undisciplined self, and not her trial, to thank for the failure she declared life was to her.

In nothing did she more err than in the coldness she evinced to her gentle husband and to her daughters. She did not attempt to conceal her contempt for the former, her indifference to the latter. When, however, her eldest daughter came out, the mother's pride was roused within her, for Mary Davenel was sweet and refined-looking. Mrs. Davenel resolved she should make a grand match. But, in one thing her daughter took after her, and that was, she had an unbending will.

In her very first season, she fell deeply in love with Faulkner Stewart, a distant connection of the Davenels, whom she had known and played with

when she was a child; but whom she had not met for two or three years. He was a hopeless ineligible, plenty of good blood in his veins, plenty of ability, very charming, but with no expectations, and was only a clerk in the Foreign Office. Of course her mother would not hear of the marriage, so the young people waited patiently for some years; but it was weary work, and Mr. Stewart never realised how much Mary had to bear in her own home, more especially when she refused one or two undeniably good offers for his sake.

Toute chose arrive à qui sait attendre; so at last, when hope was dying out of their hearts, Mary's godmother departed this life, leaving her a small competence. When this happy fortune came to her, Mary with her brother's help wrung a reluctant consent to her marriage; but not till her mother had insisted on her daughter's tying up every penny of her money on herself, and her possible children—a thing Miss Davenel would never have consented to, had not her lover, in this one thing at least, agreed with Mrs. Davenel. He was very glad to prove it was Mary and not her money he wanted.

They married, and were very happy for a few years, Kitty's birth only giving increased brightness to their home. But a terrible end came to

all this. They were staying at The Chase: a thing they rarely did, for Mrs. Davenel, who was awful in most relations of life, was still more so as a mother-in-law, in which capacity she outraged all possible conceptions of disagreeability, so much so that Mr. Stewart would rarely visit at the house. One fatal day during their visit, poor Mary, who had the family failing of obstinacy, insisted on trying a too spirited horse, which, taking fright, threw her. She was fearfully injured, they dared not even move her from where she fell, and she died there, her head on her husband's shoulder, his arms round her, her poor dying eyes looking into his as with painful gasps she murmured: "God bless you, my love, for my happy life; God bless you and our darling!" and then the head sank back and all was over.

For a time Mrs. Davenel was frantic: every harshness to her gentle daughter came back to her like a fresh stab; she shut herself up in her own room for days, refusing to see anyone. By-and-by she came out, looking much the same as ever, except that the mouth was more compressed, the frown more frequent, the tone sharper. Poor woman! she let her trouble harden, not soften her.

The child was to remain with her grandparents, Mr. Stewart having accepted a five years' appointment

in India, which took him away from old and happy associations, now so poignantly painful. He felt his loss deeply, but as years went on he took great interest in his work. He also had much pleasure in society, and was a man of many friends. His affection seemed intense for his little girl; and now that the time for his home-coming drew near, though he frankly said he was sorry to leave India, his letters were cheerful and full of anticipation.

Anastasia did not even arrive at the short-lived happiness enjoyed by her sister. It was fated that the mother's ambition that her daughters should make good matches was not to be gratified. Her hopes were not, however, so great for her second girl; Anastasia being neither clever, pretty, nor lively, and even the huge *dot* she would have if she married to her mother's liking, failed to attract what was considered suitable. To crown all, the unlucky girl fell in love with the young partner of the village doctor. This Dr. Fearon was a thorough gentleman, but very poor, and not equal to her in position. Anastasia had not it in her to make a steady fight as her sister had done. No; she gave up her lover at once, but went on caring for him; and so had always the blighted weary look which weak people put on when they lose what they dare not struggle

for. It was now twelve years since the young doctor had left the village, which Mrs. Davenel had made too hot for him after he had dared to raise his eyes to her daughter. Report said that nothing better could have happened to him, for he was really clever, and the scope for his talents, denied him in the country, was beginning to find its way in London. So in this, as is often the case, the woman suffered the most. Certainly it was not a cheery family to dwell among, and I found the first few weeks, till I got used to a very doleful state of things, a little trying to one so cheerful as I was. I used to speculate how it would be when Mr. Stewart appeared on the scene. Judging from his letters, which were often shown to me, he seemed a naturally bright man, with no unnecessary reserve or nonsense about him, who took a lively, humorous view of things and of persons, which must make his society very pleasant and invigorating. The touch of deeper feeling which gleamed now and then through the clever fun he wrote to make his Kitty laugh, lent greater interest to all he said, conveying the impression of one who had suffered, but who had suffered bravely, rightly, as a good man suffers, letting his grief raise, not lower him.

I am mixing up what Lady Sarah wrote me, and

what I myself found out by degrees, in a somewhat untidy fashion, I fear; but it is only very correctly balanced minds who can think out their thoughts tidily—I never could, I know; therefore, in these my descriptions, first one thing rises up, and then another, which I jot down as they come to me.

I cannot conclude my story of the family without saying a little about dear old Mr. Davenel. He was always kindly and polite to me in public, but nothing more; however, I soon learnt to be great friends with him in private, and it came about after this wise. He was both a great sportsman and fisherman, and in the latter art peculiarly excelled. It was remarked that soon after his marriage he took to these amusements with renewed, and even greater avidity than before. Perhaps it was because they gave him many hours' freedom away from his home; for though he never ceased adoring his wife, there was, as I said before, too much fear mingled with his affection for him not to feel it like a holiday when he was absent from her. Once or twice Kitty and I met him in our rambles, and he always joined us, seemingly glad to be with us.

One day at breakfast he remarked in a very pointed manner, yet looking steadily away from us: "I think I shall fish in the Yellow Pool this afternoon."

When Kitty and I were upstairs, she said: "Grandpapa means we are to go to the Yellow Pool this afternoon."

I stared, and asked the child how she knew that?

"I know quite well, Miss Sterling. Grandpapa always lets me know in that sort of way where he is going when he wants me to join him."

"But why does he not ask you straight out?" I remarked, being still new to the ways of this secretive household.

"Oh, because grandmamma would be sure to make some objection. She always does, you know, to any plan unless she or Uncle Horace has proposed it."

I could not bear even this most innocent deception, feeling everything ought to be perfectly straightforward in our dealings with children. But, after all, the grandfather had more right than anyone else in that house to dispose of Kitty's movements; and much as I hated underhand ways, I was beginning to arrive at the, to me, new and painful knowledge, that there are people in the world with whom perfect openness is impossible.

After that we often joined Mr. Davenel in his fishing rambles, and very pleasant times they were. He had a great love for flowers, and all the manifold objects of interest in the country. He

was clever as regards natural history, so taught us a good deal—and we were willing and apt pupils. Those excursions in his company through the lovely grounds and wildernesses in his vast property are among my pleasantest recollections of The Chase.

So long as the daily lessons were accomplished to the utmost tittle of the law, and so certified in the awful weekly examination Mrs. Davenel held with me on the subject, the times of our going out were left at my disposal; and, loving to please the old man, I managed as often as I could that our walking hours should suit his convenience. He was always so kind to me, asking me about my dear home people, and taking such interest in the details I gave him of our simple life at Durnford.

“I am afraid you must often want to be at home, my dear,” he said once, when we were all three sitting under the shade of a fine old oak, resting after a scrambling walk, and disposing of some sandwiches and fruit he had brought out in his picnic basket.

I could not answer him at first. I had been so struggling against home-sickness that day, having heard that my mother was not well, and longing to be

with her. He saw the tears in my eyes, then gently patting my hand, he said :

"Never mind, dear ; you are doing a good work by being here. You are making my Mary's child happier than she has yet been. I liked you from the first moment you came into the house, and I thought you would do. You must try and stay with us."

How curious ! Everyone begged me to stay, as if it were a thing quite unexpected, till I at last had a feeling as if I had better live with my boxes half packed, and myself ready to start.

"I have no wish to go away while you are content with me," I answered. "I am very fond of Kitty ; you are most kind to me, and it is, on the whole, comfortable."

Perhaps that last phrase was chilly, also was a little too truthful ; but it was my way to blurt out exactly what I thought, and very "comfortable" was not a term to be applied to anyone living under the same roof with and in dependence on Mrs. Davenel.

"I know, I know," answered the old man, with a slightly troubled look ; "it is very difficult always to please, but so far you do very well. Mrs. Davenel has not found any fault with the way you teach

and manage Kitty, except she thinks you over-indulge her; but I venture not to agree with her in that."

Here Mr. Davenel assumed a triumphant marital air, like a garment which was many sizes too small to fit. He then went on:

"It is not her way to praise; you must not expect it. She thinks that praising people makes them conceited, and maybe she's right; besides, if she has no fault to find, that is a sort of praise from her. Also, she sees your playing in the evening amuses Horace, and what amuses him pleases her. I think she wishes you to stay; so try and feel very comfortable with us."

I promised him I would do so, and told him that what he had just said comforted me; and indeed it did. I was also well aware I might go farther and fare worse. Mr. Davenel proceeded, talking half as if to himself:

"Sometimes I really think poor people have the best of it after all. For instance, though you, my dear, have always lived in a small cottage, you seem to have been far happier and more cheerful there than we in our great house. How is it, I wonder?"

I could have told him that one weary dissatisfied nature, invested with plenitude of power, could

make even heaven itself gloomy ; but of course I held my peace. Despotism must always be more or less felt to our hurt ; but if we are used to it, it does not weigh on us with the crushing sense it would do supposing we were awakened to its power and realized the fulness of our misery.

“ Ah well ! ” he resumed, “ riches no doubt have their trials as well as their blessings ; but I have Mrs. Davenel to help me, and what a comfort that is ! If you only knew, my dear Miss Sterling, how wonderfully she manages and controls everything ; but for her I should make no end of mistakes. It is a pity she can't take my place as magistrate, as she truly says I do great mischief by the way I let off people ; literally encouraging them in their faults.”

I had much ado to smother a laugh, as a vision of tall Mrs. Davenel, in her short morning robes, dispensing justice in the magistrate's room, flitted before my mind's eye.

“ There, unfortunately, she cannot help me,” he continued ; “ but in everything else I consult her always ; so she saves me from many a blunder. I wish you could have seen her when she was young ; she was so beautiful, and she is still very handsome ; don't you think so ? ”

I could safely answer this in the affirmative, though smiling to myself, as I felt I could now understand how in Lady Sarah's young days, Mr. Davenel's simple naïveté, so evidently and always a part of himself, must have made the saucy girl laugh in the schoolroom. Yet I did not feel inclined to laugh at him in his old age, for the faith and trusting simplicity he evinced seemed very beautiful and drew my heart to him. It was a sore pity that his unselfish affection should be bestowed on one who did not seem to appreciate it.

Mr. Davenel talked more and more to me as we became better acquainted; we had many a quiet chat like the latter part of the conversation related above, while Kitty hunted for wild-flowers near us. Sometimes we used to be very merry—more like three light-hearted children than anything else—Mr. Davenel was so free from care when away from the house. I always felt less home-sick after one of those pleasant excursions.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PASSAGE OF ARMS.

As the weather became more summer-like, Kitty Stewart and I almost lived out-of-doors, doing as many of our lessons as we could sitting on the terrace, the sea murmuring a soft accompaniment to our voices.

It was about now that I had my first passage of arms with Captain Davenel. It was an idle time with him; no hunting or shooting, fishing not much to his taste, lawn-tennis forbidden, because of the over-exertion for his weak chest. He was very hipped, so much so that he neither cared to have people at The Chase, nor to stay away himself. He was not much of a reader, caring only for the Jorrock's style of literature; so there seemed nothing else for his idle hands to do than the small mischief of teasing Kitty and interfering with lessons.

As old Mr. Davenel affirmed, he had taken a fancy to my music. When the mood took him, a summons came for me to go to the drawing-room, and there many and many an evening I sat playing to him, now one piece, now another, or rambling on without notes just as he liked; he lying meanwhile stretched on some distant sofa, reading or half dozing, or sometimes listening with his eyes fixed on vacancy, his hands clasped above his head. I do not mean to say that he was not generally quite civil—even thanking me occasionally; but no man or woman either can play the despot in his or her home, without sometimes forgetting the laws of good breeding; and the seeing him take all service rendered to him as a sort of right, chafed me. I believe, could Mrs. Davenel have known how the young governess felt, as she sat apparently so meekly at her post, and then rose to go when the small musical performance was over, and she was expected to leave the room, that august lady would have been indeed irate with her.

Well, to describe my quarrel with Captain Davenel, which was after this wise. One morning, towards the end of June, the soft warm air enticed us out earlier than usual on to our beloved terrace, and

the child and I were deep in some abstruse study or other, when we heard steps and smelt a cigar. "That's Uncle Horace!" exclaimed Kitty, beaming all over as she sprang up to greet him.

"Kitty, sit still, it is lesson time," I remarked. The child reluctantly obeyed; we had arrived at obedience, but it was not yet *con amore* that she rendered it. The steps and the low soft whistle neared, and presently the son and heir came up the stairs leading from the south garden, and joined us. He made a sort of apology:

"Excuse my interrupting. I won't stay long, but this is such a capital look-out place, the best we have. I want to make out that ship, she is an unusual size;" so speaking he unfolded a telescope, which Kitty insisted on looking through. I also, supposing this was only an accidental visit on his part, was persuaded to take a peep.

It was very interesting to see everything so clearly, and he good-naturedly took great pains to fix the telescope to our sights, telling us a good deal about the ship which by its power was brought so close within our gaze.

He only stayed half an hour, and as he did not come the next day, I felt there was no cause for complaint as regarded interruption; but for the

week after, he came regularly ; at first making some flimsy pretext for intrusion, then giving no apology, the time of the stay lengthening each morning. I gave several plain hints that it did not do to disturb lessons, but they were not attended to. Kitty hailed his advent with delight—I think the child who would dislike her lessons being interfered with would be a very extraordinary phenomenon. He did all he could to distract her and me too from our work ; and sometimes, for I was naturally very cheerful, I forgot the prim part I was trying to play, and would laugh out aloud at some absurdity ; and though I would be preternaturally grave afterwards, I could not efface the fact that I had laughed, or take back the encouragement it had given him to persevere till he made me laugh again. I felt sure this must not go on, yet I did not dare to speak to Mrs. Davenel ; so one day I sought her daughter and told her all about it, begging her to use her influence with her brother to prevent his coming.

“ I interfere with Horace ! ” said Miss Davenel, opening her bright-blue eyes to their fullest extent, till they seemed all white ; “ why, he never attended to me in his life ; he just laughs or gets angry, and then goes and does just the opposite to what I ask him.”

"Then I must speak to Mrs. Davenel," I said, with the face of one who must swallow a nasty dose of medicine; at least, I fear my features must have assumed that expression, for a ghost of a smile appeared on Anastasia's countenance; a full-bodied one rarely showed itself on her somewhat melancholy face.

"No, no," she answered hastily; "you had far better not speak to mamma. If anyone makes a complaint of Horace to her she never forgives them. She would of course be furious if she heard he came to the schoolroom at all. She was so when he used to go there in Miss Smith's time; but it was always Miss Smith she blamed, and not Horace. She would do precisely the same with you; so do not speak to her."

"Did Miss Smith leave because of that, Miss Davenel?" I asked. (Miss Smith was the lady who preceded me.) "I do not mean to be curious, but I think I ought to know more, and then I can better tell what to do."

I spoke the more unreservedly, for Miss Davenel and I had been quite friendly over some new stitch I had taught her, so, after her lymphatic fashion, she liked me; also I knew kindness dictated her advice now.

"She did leave because of that," said Anastasia. "You see she was a great goose, and sly to boot. She fancied Horace was in love with her, so let him come whenever he liked, hiding it and making Kitty hide it too. Mamma went to the schoolroom unexpectedly and caught him holding skeins of wool for her to disentangle. She said very little to her. I think she was too angry to speak; but she inquired and found out. The end of it was Miss Smith left the next day."

"And your brother," I said indignantly, "what did he do, for it was his fault?"

"Horace did nothing. He did not really care for her; he told me he had been getting very tired of it, she was so silly. He made me give her a beautiful present, and get her into another situation. Poor thing! she nearly cried her eyes out before she left."

I felt there was a great moral for my benefit to be deduced from this simple story, but how was I to apply it? I could neither act like Miss Smith, nor run the chance of her fate, and most certainly nothing would make me cry my eyes out for Captain Davenel. But what was I to do?

"Please give me your best advice, Miss Davenel," I cried. "I am not to speak to your mother; you

will not speak to Captain Davenel; and yet this cannot go on."

"No, it ought not; and I am very sorry for you; but I never could help anyone," she said, with a puzzled worried look on her face. "I do think that your best plan, Miss Sterling, is to speak out plainly yourself to Horace. He sometimes listens to people when he likes them. I think he likes you; certainly he likes your beautiful music. Only, whatever you do, don't let mamma know anything about it, that's all; she can be so dreadfully angry." Here Anastasia heaved a deep sigh, at the remembrance, no doubt, of some stormy scenes in her past life. "I wish I could help you in this," she concluded; "but, indeed, it is always best if I don't interfere."

I left her not much comforted, nay, rather feeling how difficult it would be to steer my small bark skilfully in these unknown waters. I knew well if I offended Captain Davenel he had it in his power to be most disagreeable to me; also, so to influence his mother against me, that my stay at The Chase might be rendered almost intolerable. He evidently thought his presence gave such unqualified delight that he would be sure to be all the more indignant at my begging to be freed from it. Yet how could I let things go on as they were? Only that morning I had seen

a grin on Mercy's face as she looked from my bedroom window on to the terrace where Captain Davenel was sitting with us ; also at another time I had overheard her say to a fellow-servant : " There's the Captain at his tricks again, Betsy. Miss Sterling will catch it if missis gets to know of it." This had been enough for me, and had hastened my visit to Miss Davenel. I, Muriel Sterling, was not one to submit quietly to servants talking me over, or their mistress finding me out in small deceptions. I went to bed that night with no fixed plan in my head, only very resolved, *coûte qui coûte*, to end this business as soon as possible.

The next morning was somewhat cloudy, the breeze cooler than it had been for a few days past. Altogether it did not look so tempting for sitting out ; this gave me an opportunity not to be neglected.

" Kitty," I remarked carelessly, " we will not sit out this morning, I think ; you might catch cold."

" May I not put a shawl on, Miss Sterling, please ?" said the child pleadingly.

" We will run no risks, little one," I answered ; " we can do our lessons even better in the school-room."

She gave me a quick look, but did not dare remonstrate, as I drew down the window, and placed our two chairs with their backs to it. Presently came the footsteps we had learnt to associate with that hour, and then an imperative tap at the window.

"What, in the name of all that's unaccountable, are you doing in here to-day?" was the annoyed query shouted through the closed casement. I rose and stepped to the window, signing to Kitty to remain seated.

"It is cooler to-day, Captain Davenel," I in my turn shouted, "so Kitty had best not sit out; also we are freer from interruption in here," I added, with, I flattered myself, quite a middle-aged governess sort of air. But he did not seem in the least impressed, and only bawled in reply :

"What nonsense! The sun happens to be in for a few minutes; but the wind is due west, and that never hurts anyone. Come out; it won't give her a cold, and I have something to show you both."

Here he held up to view a nest with some pretty fledglings in it. Kitty had been turning round and peeping all she could, and now wild horses could not have kept her from rushing to view nearer such

an entrancing spectacle. Captain Davenel flung the window open—I had never thought of latching it—and coolly stepped in.

“After all, you are right; it is not at all bad in here,” he said composedly, placing himself in our one easy, or rather uneasy chair, and laying the nest with its poor frightened inmates on the table for Kitty’s inspection.

“Wheugh!” he exclaimed, “this is an uncomfortable penitential sort of lounge; we must make the old granny send us in some comfortable ones, must we not, Miss Kitty? Now what lessons are you doing? All sorts of ridiculous and useless ologies I’ll be bound, which will only stuff your poor little head to repletion, and make you dreadfully stupid for evermore. I will teach you this morning; I am sure you will have more fun with me than Miss Sterling lets you have.”

Kitty laughed, that boisterous laugh so often elicited by his jokes, and which I so hated, then ran towards him with a handful of books. I saw he was really angry under all his pretence of fun, saw that he had seen through the little device with which I had innocently hoped I might induce him not to intrude on us, and I guessed that he intended punishing me by making my pupil as rebellious as

possible. "Now or never," I thought to myself; "if soft measures won't do, hard ones shall."

I am a good-tempered woman enough, at least they thought me so at home, and what one's home people think of one's temper is the real test after all; but, as Lottie said, when I was once fairly roused, I was roused and no mistake about it.

"Kitty," I said, enunciating each syllable clearly and coldly; "I wish you please to go to your aunt Anastasia, and ask her to give you the second volume of that history we are now reading."

Kitty and her uncle both looked up surprised; they had never heard that tone in my voice before. My pupil at once rose and left the room. I knew it would be a good ten minutes or more before she returned, which would be enough for what I had to say. Captain Davenel still leant lazily back, but not so comfortably as before. I sat bolt upright, waiting till I heard the child's footsteps die away in the passage; then I remarked with the same icy manner and intonation:

"You will oblige me, Captain Davenel, by not visiting your little niece during lessons. It is a great interruption. Her grandparents would not like it." Then seeing a half angry, half contemptuous sneer on his face, my pretended calmness forsook me, and

with an indignant flush I resumed, "and I do not like it either."

This addendum was, of course, injudicious on my part. I ought to have been satisfied with the first argument, which sufficiently entrenched itself behind the rights of the thing without dragging my individual feelings into the question; but I was angry, so out the words came. There was a long pause, during which I sat with eyes cast down. I had fired my shot, and waited to see the results.

"Your last reason," at last drawled my adversary in his laziest, most provoking tones, "is, of course, unanswerable. I suppose you expect me to attend to it; but your first can soon be bowled over. I can answer for it that one grandparent would be only too thankful if more interruptions did come to the lessons, for he thinks, and so do I, that Kitty has much too much of that sort of thing. As for my mother, she knows nothing of what goes on here in the mornings, at which time she is always busy doing her scoldings and ferreting into things; besides, I can always manage her. Your not liking it is the only part of it I mind; but if all the rest of it can be managed, you surely would not mind my coming in occasionally. You see my

life is rather a dull one at present," remarked the young man much more gently, as slowly rising from his seat and coughing the while, as he always did during any speech longer than usual, he walked to the mantelpiece, against which he leant, looking down at me from his altitude of six feet two as he resumed his discourse.

"You see, Miss Sterling, when I am seedy as I am now, strangers are a great bore. I get awfully tired of the old people, while Anastasia is the slowest of the slow. Here I must remain, though I am sick of The Chase; but I am not up to going anywhere, and have even had to sell out, as I am no longer fit for work. Now Kitty is very dear to me, for her own and her mother's sake; and—why should I hide it?—I took to you at once, you are such a comfortable happy-looking little thing. I always like little women best, being tired of the yards there are of us. I cannot see what harm I do by coming here. It amuses me and does me good, and it does not hurt anybody." Here another fit of coughing took him. When it ceased he went on in still more mild persuasive tones: "You will let me come, will you not?"

I was fairly nonplussed. I was prepared to do battle *à outrance*; but here was the enemy with

arms laid down, pleading, when I had only expected anger and defiance. I am horribly weak when I am asked anything, I always long to grant it, and though till then I had almost disliked Captain Davenel, somehow I felt very sorry for him as he stood looking at me with his pale weary face, and his thin attenuated figure. I was going to answer I scarcely know what, but I fear something in the nature of a compromise, so plausibly had he put it, when he went on :

“Of course I was wrong to force my way in, after that decided hint to me to keep out; but you see, the last lady here was good enough to let me in whenever I liked, and to connive at little innocent mysteries; so I really thought you were mostly pretending till I saw, after I came in, that you were downright angry. But I can tell now that you are very different from the ordinary run of young ladies; still, if you will only let me, sometimes—sometimes come here,” he repeated, fixing his eyes eagerly on my face, “I will not be troublesome, I promise you that. I will be exceedingly quiet and inoffensive; you would do me good, for I could learn lots from you.”

All this was tremendously flattering! To be entreated of, by the young king who ruled these small domains, instead of being commanded. Still,

through all this, I fancied I saw the cynical curl of the lips, as if he were half making game of me the whole time; this, and the tones of Mercy's voice, in my room, which just then accidentally fell on my ears, brought back to me all my good resolutions, and the need for them, so I answered him firmly, but with more kindness than before:

"The way you have put things, Captain Davenel, almost tempts me to yield; but unless Mrs. Davenel knows and approves of your coming here, I cannot let you do so. I doubt the wisdom of these interruptions, as far as Kitty's lessons are concerned, even if consent were given to them; still it shall be, of course, just as your mother wishes. She ought to be consulted before you come again."

Captain Davenel fairly laughed; the sneer returning to his face as he answered:

"Fancy my mother being told of this and consenting! You do not know her yet. She would not be vexed with me—she never is—but she would turn her whole wrath on you, would consider you only to blame. For your sake we must tell her nothing about it. It will be quite easy to hold our tongues. I will take good care only to come when I know she is well out of the way. Let us consider it settled, my

dear little——” but here he stopped suddenly, startled by the expression he saw in my face, and resumed in an awkward manner, “my dear Miss Sterling.”

He had not long now to wait for his answer. I felt furious, and rising impetuously, faced him, my words coming fast and quick.

“I admire your coolness and composure in this affair, Captain Davenel; but you are quite comfortable, for you will never be blamed, and you are perfectly willing that I should run the risk of almost certain detection, of your mother’s displeasure—rightful displeasure—which might render my stay here an impossibility. Even supposing your mother never found out that you were constantly here, do you think or care what it would be to me, to be in her employ, and yet daily, hourly, to be deceiving her? You say I am different to other young ladies. I hope I am not; I earnestly hope not. I would be heartily sorry to believe that you could find many willing to act a lie as you want me to do. You must have hitherto met with but poor specimens of women, to believe us capable of so much deception. I am sure, I only feel as every right-minded girl should feel, when I say I could never consent to such meanness as you propose.

And oh ! the worst of all is 'the teaching your little niece to hide, to deceive—how could you wish that for a moment ? I am ashamed of you."

I could not speak any more ; I stood there, shaking from head to foot, feeling, now my passion had spent itself, that I longed to rush away from his presence, and yet I was as if fascinated, my eyes fixed on him.

A great change, or rather changes, had passed over his face during my impetuous outburst ; first intense surprise, then confusion, the cynical look fast disappearing as the blood mounted to his very forehead.

He stood still for a moment ; then stepping slowly forward, laid his hand gently on mine, which grasped the back of a chair. He looked me full in the eyes, saying gravely, and in a very low voice :

"I beg your pardon, you are quite right, and I will never intrude here without your permission."

Then he withdrew his hand, and left the room, leaving me a victor, but neither happy nor comfortable. Are victors ever very happy, I wonder ? or does their triumph which seems so sweet in anticipation always have such a bitter after-taste ? Certainly mine had. I felt quite sure I had done right ; done

that which I could not have respected myself if I had left undone, but it was the manner of my doing which vexed me. I was much annoyed with myself for the passion I had been in. A really well-disciplined young woman would in a gentle sweet voice have discussed the matter with discreet maidenly wisdom, or with tears in her lovely eyes would have appealed to Captain Davenel's better nature, thereby winning her triumph in a meek saintly sort of fashion. Whereas I had rated him, flown out at him, blustered and stormed. But though I felt ashamed of myself, I feared I should do just the same under equal provocation, so completely had I lost my control. The whole scene surprised me almost as much as it had surprised him. I never supposed for a moment that a gentleman could deliberately propose such a course of deception; even now it was difficult to realize it, till I remembered how years passed in continued and small selfishnesses must inevitably lower and deteriorate a nature—till I remembered that both at home and abroad this man was accustomed to have his will deferred to, his wishes obeyed, till he had grown to think all he suggested must be right.

I believe I fretted myself unnecessarily; for I can see now that nothing short of my very plain speaking

would have made Captain Davenel believe I was in earnest, or have evoked the gentlemanly instincts which at last caused him to yield to me.

But the misery of the past half-hour was too recent for me to be able to give myself this comfort. I kept wondering how things would be after this. Would Captain Davenel send me to Coventry, regarding me from henceforth as a sort of virago who must be ignored and kept at a distance?

I had not as yet a liking for him; rather the contrary; but it always gave me great pain to contradict or oppose anyone; therefore, perhaps, when I did do so, I overdid it, as is usually the case when one steps outside one's ordinary nature. Perhaps I should not again be invited into the drawing-room to play. This idea made me sorry; and it was very probable it would be so, for he was the only one in the house who really enjoyed my music, and, though the family circle was dull, still I should miss those occasional breaks in the monotony of my life.

I can understand a middle-aged governess liking to have her evenings to herself, but not a young one. To me to have people round me was a sort of life's

necessity. Even if, as here, they did not speak much to me, still I had something to look at—something to think over. The long solitary evenings were what I most disliked at The Chase, and in them I most hungered for my dear home people.

I was still standing by the table not one bit triumphant, but with a sort of guilty feeling of “there, I’ve done it at last,” pervading me, when Kitty returned. She came in with the flurried, worried look, which, when it appeared on the face of any inhabitant of the house, so often betokened a recent encounter with its mistress.

“Oh, Miss Sterling,” she began, “I hope you don’t mind my being so long, but auntie kept me when she heard Uncle Horace was here.” (I felt this as being good-natured on Miss Davenel’s part, and it came as balm to me, betokening as it did, how fully she trusted I would do right.) “Well, after I left her, I met granny, who asked me what I was doing out of the schoolroom, and was very angry, saying you had no business to send messages during lessons. I remembered what you said, so did not try to make excuses, but kept quite silent. Also I took care not to mention Uncle Horace was here. But,” said the child, looking round her with a disappointed air, “I

see he is gone ; what a pity. I thought we were going to have such fun."

How glad I felt now, that whether or not I had bungled at it, still that I had done as I had done. This habit of concealment on the little girl's part must not be allowed to go on.

"Kitty," I said gently, "your uncle has gone, and has promised me he will not come again. He ought not to do it, unless your grandmother wishes it, and we must not hide things from her ever again."

The child put on a sulky dissatisfied look ; but drawing the little golden head nearer to me, I spoke to her reasonably, not saying much, but trying to make my words clear and to the point. Once she broke in with : "But, Miss Sterling, you like it too sometimes. Uncle Horace says your eyes and face are full of fun, and that there is nothing he enjoys more than making you laugh ; he told me so only yesterday."

"You are right, dear," I answered, "I do enjoy fun very much, but it must be fun of the right sort ; and fun which consists in hiding things and is underhand does not really amuse me."

Gradually I persuaded my little friend, giving

her I hope larger ideas on the subject of perfect openness than she had ever had before ; and when the cloud had passed from her bonny face, I dismissed the subject, and we achieved a better morning's lessons than we had done for some time.

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

THE next two or three evenings I received no summons to the drawing-room. I only saw Captain Davenel at lunch, when he rarely addressed me, though I noticed sundry furtive glances in my direction. Perhaps, now he knew my explosive properties, he shunned me as one would a case of dynamite. I tried to make a joke of it, but it was not comfortable. At last, Kitty informed me that grandmamma expected me to play some accompaniments for some people who were going to dine at The Chase that evening. Indeed, at luncheon that same day, Mrs. Davenel, with her usual charming way of putting things, told me this, adding :

“ There will be a good many people, Miss Sterling, so you can wear your best dress, though I daresay no one will much notice what you have on.”

Accordingly, in obedience to her behest, I donned the best my small wardrobe furnished. My pupil took deep interest in my toilet, expressing great approval of the simple white dress, and insisting on my wearing some vivid-hued flowers from the conservatory, which perhaps suited my dark colouring. Any way, I surveyed myself with some slight satisfaction in the schoolroom mirror, till I toned down my vanity by the remembrance of those kind words, "no one will notice what you have on."

Perhaps the moral blisters of mankind, of whom my worthy employeress was such a stinging specimen, do their good work in life by subduing all undue exaltation on the part of their subordinates.

When the hour came I went downstairs, meek and duly chastened in spirit, and ensconced myself in a quiet corner with some knitting in my hand, as beseemed one whose part in life was not to put herself forward, but to wait till she was wanted.

The rooms—for the whole suite were thrown open—were fuller that night than I had ever seen them. They looked superb with their gorgeous furniture, and the rare exotics which adorned them nor was the effect diminished, but rather enhanced, by the groups of elegantly-dressed women, dotted here and there.

But there was a curious stiffness and ungeniality pervading everything. Mrs. Davenel was not perhaps consciously to blame for this ; she was making great exertions to please, and was going with automatic regularity from one group to another. She looked regal in her ruby velvet and diamonds ; but the stiffness which pervaded her could not be laid aside. The chilliness and depression which emanated from her icy atmosphere influenced all within her reach. Anastasia looked better than I had yet seen her ; for that afternoon her niece and I had been with her, and had persuaded her to wear some dark lace fabric, with glistening silver ornaments, which becoming toilette enhanced and set off her delicate fairness, almost giving her beauty. She seemed conscious of this, and the knowledge pleasing her, there was more animation in her face and manner than usual. I took a great deal of pleasure out of the pretty scene, as I sat there watching, and even taking a small share in the talking, with a lady who chanced to sit near me. By-and-by the gentlemen came in, whose advent, like an electric current, at once communicated vitality to the preceding apathy. Soon after their arrival there was a call for music, and my services were needed.

It is no joke that playing at sight to suit unknown

voices, and unknown tastes ; or, worst of all, no taste at all. I shall not soon forget one very plump, middle-aged young lady who would sing several times that evening. She had been fairly well taught, and might have pleased had she been possessed of modulation and ear. As it was she started with her voice high above the accompaniment, and kept it circling, darting, tearing round and about the room, till I could almost see the lightning flashes and wreaths it would have made could it have taken bodily shape. Captain Davenel was on duty near the piano, and suffered much during the performance. For the first time since the scene in the schoolroom his eyes met mine fully, with a mute appeal for sympathy. Despite the ear-splitting sensation which almost hurt me, I felt the ludicrousness ; gave him a glance, and bent low over the keys to hide my laughter. When the last song was over the fair performer turned to the rest of the audience to receive the praise for which she was thirsting. Captain Davenel stooped towards me whispering : " Well screamed, was it not ? Please sing something soft and low to restore the drum of my ear, which is nearly broken."

I gently shook my head ; I knew his mother wished for no solos from me when other musicians were present.

"Not to-night, please; there are so many to sing; some other time if you like."

To my surprise he acquiesced with unwonted docility. I really felt like a sort of domestic lion-tamer, so wonderful was it to see him yield, and at once. Looking at him I saw unusual kindness in his face. I was glad to think he had forgiven my plain speaking, and that he was not going to send me to Coventry.

A gentleman joined us, to whom he introduced me. We fell into conversation, discussing music and other things till I quite forgot my chains, and was feeling Durnford all over. We were in the midst of a great argument about some composer, and I had been playing some scraps to illustrate my meaning, when Mrs. Davenel sailed up to us with an extra dash of stiffness about her, and said haughtily: "Miss Sterling, you really must not engross the piano so much; besides, Lady Temple has just promised to give us some of her sweet music."

I felt my blushes almost hurt me as I rose immediately and withdrew to the nearest window, where I looked my full into the moonlit garden, letting the sound of music creep into my ears and soothe me as I gazed at the exquisite peeps of the


sea between the trees. It was a very perfect scene. I soon forgot where I was in the delight it gave me. "What a paradise to live in," I thought. "How delightful it would be to feel it always your home, to be the mistress here, with the wish and power to make those about you happy." Then I pictured to myself what it would be to bring my own people here, and to throw all this beauty into their lives. I was quite lost in a pleasant, but of course foolish dream, when three or four ladies in full conversation drew near to the window where I was, and attracted also by the beauty of the view, stayed there. After a chorus of "How lovely!" "How sweetly pretty!" "How awfully charming!" and other such superlative and feminine adjectives, these words fell on my ear:

"How do you like her, dear Mrs. Davenel?"

"Like her," was the answer; "I do not think about liking her; there is no need to do that. She does well enough. She belongs to a class most odious to manage, but really she has fewer defects than the average; at least, her defects have not obtruded themselves on me as yet. She talks rather more than I like, and does not yet fully understand that in her position she should wait to speak till she is spoken to. She has a way of giving her opinions

most unsuitably. Just now I had to check her talking with my guests at the piano—quite as if she were a young lady staying in the house. However, she is quick at taking a hint, so I hope I shall soon drill her into what is right.”

It was not very pleasant to listen to these cold calm words as they fell from Mrs. Davenel's lips. No one could see me as I stood hidden by the folds of the thick curtain, behind which I had taken my station. What should I do? To step forward and show I was there was, of course, the right thing to do; but it was very disagreeable, and while I was getting courage for it, the conversation glided off from me to generalities about the governess tribe; so I did not feel bound in honour to reveal myself to the ladies seated in state on the huge ottoman facing the window. There was not much mercy shown to the class to which I belonged, as Mrs. Davenel and her friends proceeded to criticise it. I was quite willing to believe we had our faults; but I thought if they would only credit us with a few ordinary virtues they might chance to find us not bankrupt in them. I felt indignant and amused by turns. Honest, fair criticism, taking both sides of the question, might, even if harsh, have influenced even though it pained me; but



spiteful remarks, unfair judgment, only temporarily annoyed. I felt, too, the absurdity of many things which were said. I believe Mrs. Davenel's guests were anxious to curry favour with her by chiming in with her mood, or else they must all have been singularly unfortunate in the instructresses they had chosen for their children. How I longed for them to move away. It was odious the listening to all this, with the possible chance, too, of my being found there. I gave them credit, perhaps, for finer feelings than they possessed, when I thought it might distress them to find I was an involuntary listener. Yet I discovered afterwards that one or two of them would have been sorry to have given pain, also were women very kind to their own governesses, but had fallen into the bad habit of abusing us generally, because—well! perhaps because it is easier to swim with the tide in comfortable blame of people than to set ourselves against the rest of the world by holding our tongues, or by praising. I would fain hope that if we had more courage many of us women would oftener refrain from the unkind speaking we are so apt to indulge in, would oftener try to say good instead of evil of others.

At last, when I was half-smiling, half-wincing at some bitter remark, I chanced to raise my eyes, and,

to my surprise, saw Captain Davenel looking at me. He also had come to the window, and was listening quietly to the chorus of animadversions. He had screened himself behind the opposite curtain, so was the only one of the party who could see me. Doubtless for some time past he had been watching how I felt, and perhaps resented all that was said. I was terribly vexed to find I was observed. I was preparing, at the cost of any remarks, to leave the corner where I had so unwillingly played the part of eaves-dropper, when he placed his fingers on his lips and motioned me to remain still.

He then turned to the ladies, saying: "Don't you think you have worn this subject perfectly thread-bare? I have been listening for some time, and can truly say my hair is standing on end with horror to think of all the miseries poor persecuted mistresses have to undergo from the ladies who teach their children. Or, it would stand on end, only I don't quite believe in them all."

One fair little dame, with an abundance of blond hair, giggled as she said: "I never noticed you were there, Captain Davenel; we should have changed our conversation at once, for ours has been a truly feminine talk."

Captain Davenel's sneer was perceptible in his

voice as he replied: "Most truly feminine talk certainly, Mrs. Vernon; and conducted with truly feminine charity towards your less fortunate sisters. But it is good of you to wish to alter your talk for me. Will you add to your kindness by singing me one of those charming ballads with which you delighted us when you last dined here?"

Mrs. Vernon coloured, as if she felt his rebuke, but at once agreed to sing; and Mrs. Davenel, seeing that her son wished to break up the séance, took the other ladies to the piano end of the room, so that I was left unperceived in my nook.

I was very grateful to him for his clever management; and, after waiting a minute or two, thought I would try and slip away and get up to my own room. I knew I should not be wanted again, as people were thinking of going, and I felt I longed to be alone. I was just leaving my shelter when I heard a step behind me, and a voice sounding in my ears:

"Miss Sterling, will you believe me when I tell you that I am sure these ladies, who have just indulged in the full venom of their tongues, would be distressed if they thought you had overheard them? I am truly sorry, and offer you the apology I know they would make, if they knew the pain they

must I fear have given you. Besides, they talked such nonsense. For instance, Mrs. Vernon really over-spoils her gover—— I mean the lady who teaches her children. I expect it was only to please my mother she went on as she did. As for my mother," rejoined Captain Davenel, colouring slightly, "her bark is always I think worse than her bite."

"Please don't be so distressed about it, Captain Davenel," I answered, smiling up in his face as brightly as I could; for the lash had been applied fiercely, and it still hurt. "I am quite sure not one word would have been said could they have known I was near. But you must not think I am a listener. I never did such a thing before. They began the subject so quickly after they came here, that before I fully understood their meaning it was made extremely awkward for me to reveal myself. Besides, they were not speaking of me or abusing me personally, so I did not feel it was dishonourable to remain here; it was only so very unpleasant. I am much obliged to you for extricating me from so disagreeable a position. It is a lesson to me never to go behind a curtain again; but I felt such a wish to enjoy all that undisturbed," I added, pointing to the fairy-like view before us.

"I know, I understand," he answered, "indeed I

think I shall never misunderstand you again. Also, you look as unlike the genus 'listener' as a woman can look. Indeed, may I add, that you look equally unlike the class we have just heard so shamefully abused."

"That is no consolation to me," I replied warmly, my heart still very sore within me. "I would not mind if I did, for women who work bravely for their daily bread and for their dear ones should be honoured and not sneered at. It is possible I may not look like that 'class,' as you call us; but it is only because I am young, because I am so freshly from home, and also, here my work is much easier and lighter than it is for most of my sister workers. But just wait a few years; wait till I am worn and weary with the perpetual grind, the perpetual monotonous grind; wait till I have acquired the orthodox, prim governess air, the joyless, hopeless manner which those ladies just now blamed, and yet which they must deem the only fitting manner for us, condemning as they do any other that we may venture to have. Wait till this comes to me, as come it must in the course of years, and then I too shall be, and look, of that 'class' also."

"You have a right to talk bitterly," he answered, "but you should scarcely do so to me, at least not to-night, when I feel so truly for you."

There was a hurt tone in his voice, which touched me and made me say :

"Indeed I ought not to have spoken as I have done ; but I am cross, and sore, and irritable. I will just go up to my own room, and shake myself into good-humour again."

"That's right," he responded, as I was preparing to pass him ; "but even at the risk of offending I must reiterate, that you could never become like a sort of inanimate machine, whatever position in life you may fill. You will always stand out with marked individuality from most of your sex " (did he mean my power of storming at people, I wonder ?) ; "there is in you," he went on, "a charm of originality, an ever varying expression, which makes looking at you a perpetual wonder 'what is to come next,' and which will always invest you with deep interest."

These last words were breathed low in my ear, so low that his moustache almost touched me as he spoke. I thought it best not to answer, and he made no further effort to detain me.

I am sure he meant all very kindly, wishing to heal the smart which he saw was stinging me ; but I felt just then as if words only chafed, so was glad to get away from the beautiful rooms, and the grand people, into the half light of the majestic old hall, and so up

to my own quarters, where I stepped on to the balcony, and bent over the balustrade, my tears falling thick and fast, as I gazed on the shimmering beauty of the sea of molten silver beneath me.

I knew much that I had heard was exaggerated. I also knew that Mrs. Davenel's remarks about me had been, for her, unusually favourable, so that I, individually, had not much right to complain; but it seemed so hard for me, and for so many others too, to spend our lives in striving to please, to do right, only to be misunderstood at last.

I refused to be comforted as I saw the long years stretching out before me, now in one situation, now in another. If I were very successful, the utmost reward I could expect would be a bare pittance, saved for my old age; if not successful, if illness or bad fortune dogged my steps, the governesses' home, or starvation. No wonder my heart quailed within me when I took this pessimist, perhaps, but certainly not altogether exaggerated view of my future life. The keenest pain of all, to my loving heart, was the feeling that no real lasting affection might be felt for me anywhere; that while I was of use I would be retained, but when no longer needed would be dismissed and forgotten.

I have heard since—indeed, even then I knew it, though I would not admit the soothing balm—that it

is not like this always, that patient continuance in well-doing has its recompense even here, that there are homes where good governesses are honoured and loved, and when they must leave, are not lost sight of but are valued as friends ; that though the full loaf of love and kindness is not perhaps meted out to them, still a crumb here and there will not be grudged to them from homes rich in love and harmony, and so they will have their small share too of the harvest of affection. Still, though I knew all this, I was just then so profoundly depressed, that I could not rise above my pain. I raised my head to wipe away my tears, and looked round me. At first the calm moonshine had its usual effect on me, of impassive superiority to mortal pain, or want of tender sympathy ; but, by-and-by, this feeling of isolation from the glory round me passed away as I became quieter and more in unison with it. I looked up into the vast firmament, studded with its innumerable gems, and then by degrees the sense of infinite power and space soothed me, making me feel that He who had created all things, from the largest to the smallest, took note of each incident in the life of even the humblest of His creatures—that He knew all. Oh, the infinite rest that He knew all, and so would let nothing come into one's life without His knowledge, would make even a

dull, monotonous, loveless life, a life great in His eyes if spent to Him. I grew more peaceful every moment, a sense of trust and confidence creeping into my heart. At last I left the terrace and re-entered the school-room. I took, as was my nightly custom, one look at my little charge, who was sleeping so peacefully. I then sought my room with a resolution to make the best, not the worst, of things. A resolution, strengthened by some words I chanced to see in a book I opened at hap-hazard—a book I loved the best of all, save one. This is what I read in it: “It is a vain thing and unprofitable to be either disturbed or pleased about future things which, perhaps, may never come to pass.” Then idly turning the leaves as I pondered over these words, I came to sentences of Divine invitation and comfort for the weary, which seemed just what I wanted. Ah, I thought, the old monk in his quiet cell also knew what it was to fret about the unknown future, but he found out how unwise it was to do so. I will find it unwise also. I soon fell asleep, for my mind was now only filled with quiet and resting thoughts.

CHAPTER X.

A SLIP AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THE next morning I rose up absolutely bristling all over with the best—the most perfect resolutions. I resolved I would see everything in its fairest light. I endowed Mrs. Davenel's few chilling comments on me with much underlying approbation, thinking it would go hard with me if I did not win even her liking at last. I little thought, as I stood by the open window enjoying the cool breezes which were so soon to give way to the burning heat of a summer's day, that the sun so brilliantly shining on the waves would not set before the watery gleams of Mrs. Davenel's favour would be extinguished beneath the clouds of her displeasure.

I joined the family at breakfast, feeling, I suspect, by far the brightest of the party, though my cheerfulness was well veiled behind the prim decorum due

to my position. My tongue, which last night's innocent listening had told me had said too much, was kept within the strictest bounds of yea and nay. Mrs. Davenel was, for her, cheerful; indeed, it was almost pleasantly she turned to me, saying:

"I must ask for a holiday for Katherine this afternoon, Miss Sterling; I wish her to go with us to Hurston Towers to spend the afternoon and evening with some friends. You may be glad of this leisure time for yourself."

I willingly assented, for it was a great treat to have a few hours to myself. Much as I loved Kitty, I did sometimes crave for one of my solitary rambles in which I could mentally adjust myself as it were. A child's companionship, however dear she may be, is not exchanging ideas on equal terms, therefore is sometimes fatiguing.

My thoughts strayed somewhat during lessons that morning, as I planned what I would do with my precious holiday. I calculated the house would be cleared by three, for it was to be a temporary exodus of the whole family. I decided while the great heat lasted I would write a home letter, and then practise. After that I would go out on the rocks, staying by the sea till it was quite dark. The tide would serve, I knew, so I would wander farther than I had yet been

able to do. I would take a book and some food with me, and in some pretty cave or nook I would rest till the moon had risen, when I would return home by its lovely light. I had no fear of lonely walks, not being nervous; also it was so quiet a part of the country, I could do all this in perfect safety. I felt like a child again in my anticipation of pleasure. I superintended Kitty's toilette with great care, I so wished her to look the best and bonniest among her young friends. "I wish you were coming too, dear Miss Muriel," she whispered, as she clung round my neck for the parting kiss. I returned the caress, but could not endorse the wish. I then dismissed the child, full of the brightest expectations of enjoyment.

The letter was soon written, the warm oppressive air not being favourable to composition. As a rule, I only presented a cheerful aspect of affairs for home consumption: where was the use of worrying them? So, unless I had to consult my mother on any point, I omitted telling her of things which might disturb. For instance, I described in this letter the last night's festivity as graphically as I could, but made no mention of the "curtain-lecture" to which I had listened.

Before settling to my music, the next item to be fulfilled in the day's programme, I went to post

my letter in the box in the hall. "This time," I thought, "I will go into the hall by the grand staircase. I like best to see it from there, and the family being out it cannot disturb their dignity." When I was in the wide gallery, which, as I have already explained, went round the hall, I could not resist taking a good look at the family portraits, of which there were a profusion decorating the walls, the Davenel peculiarities of height and thinness and fair colouring being reproduced at every turn, save where here and there some darker or stouter personage betokened some interloper by marriage, and then it almost seemed as if the Davenels, pure and simple, frowned askance at these intruders. I was looking intently at a cavalier of Charles the Second's time, and was trying to insert Captain Davenel's face into the full wig, rather an effort of imagination in these days when men shave nearly as closely as convicts, when I heard the great clock striking four, which meant that the letter-box might be already cleared; so flying round the gallery with a little cry of dismay, I tore down the great stairs at my quickest pace, and being sure there was no one near, forgot my prim dignity and jumped the last four steps at one bound. Alas! I forgot the slippery nature of the well-polished oaken flooring.

I executed a short, wild, ungraceful glissade into a beautiful stand of rare exotics, which were a little distance off. The crash was awful. The stand, the flowers, and my unlucky self lay one confused mass on the ground. At first I was so stunned I could hear and see nothing, but I felt hands raising me up while a strange voice exclaimed: "Poor child, I hope she is not seriously hurt!"

"I trust not," said another voice, which I recognised as Captain Davenel's; "but her forehead must be cut deeply; let us lay her on that sofa and look to it."

I was lifted gently up, then as gently laid down again on the softest cushions. I now opened my eyes, and sick and dizzy as I felt still, could distinguish bending over me a white-haired old gentleman with a fine noble-looking face, while near him stood Captain Davenel with a very anxious expression, holding a huge handkerchief, with which he was proceeding to stanch the blood which flowed copiously from a cut my unlucky head had sustained against the sharp corners of the carved flower-stand.

"I don't think it is bad, I shall soon be better, thank you," I said, trying to raise my head, and looking up; when, oh horror of horrors! I beheld Mrs. Davenel fearfully rigid, almost bent backwards

with indignant perpendicularity. She may have been startled when I was taken up almost insensible, but if so she had got over it, and finding I was comparatively unhurt, the fullest indignation and annoyance reigned in her face, where sympathy was conspicuous by its absence. One always had a sort of apologetic, guilty feeling in Mrs. Davenel's presence, as if one were an uncompleted effort; so now, though I could scarcely realise in my confused state how it had all happened, or why they were there when I supposed them miles away, I tried to falter an apology.

"Don't try to talk or make excuses, you poor child," said the old man. "You had far better be silent, the mercy is that you were not killed. We were all just coming out of the library when we beheld you flying down the stairs as if—well! as if the evil one himself were behind you. Then when you, and the stand, and all fell crash, I thought there would be nothing of you left. Do you think many of your limbs are broken; half-a-dozen ought to be at least?"

"No, I fancy not," I answered, feebly laughing; for he had spoken somewhat comically, and forgetting Mrs. Davenel's wrath I only remembered how intensely ludicrous it must all have appeared; then, catching

sight of a still more indignant look on her face, and again feeling ashamed of myself, I rejoined: "I am only very bruised and shaken. Please let me put that handkerchief myself to my head, Captain Davenel, and then I will get to my room as soon as I can. I thought you were all gone out, and I am very sorry." Here I reclosed my eyes, feeling a return of the deadly faintness.

"You will just stay here till you are really fit to move," said Captain Davenel quietly. "If you, Lord Garth, will hold the handkerchief I will get a glass of wine; she wants that more than anything. Mother, do you think a doctor necessary?"

Mrs. Davenel had been inspecting the wound, and answered promptly:

"I think nothing of the sort; she has simply cut her head a little, and the wonder is, it is not worse. If Miss Sterling would learn a more decorous way of coming down my stairs, this would never have happened. She had best go to her room as soon as possible, and stay there. We have been already delayed too long as it is. My beautiful stand has suffered more than she has. There is such a mess on the floor, too," she concluded angrily.

I could not speak ; but a big tear which would not keep back rolled down my cheek, though I kept my eyes as tightly closed as possible while the storm rolled over me.

"My dear Mrs. Davenel," said my old gentleman friend kindly, "very young ladies will sometimes play their pranks. My sisters, when they were girls, never would come downstairs quietly. We used all to try who could get first, and a famous helter-skelter it used to be from top to bottom. I quite enjoyed seeing your young friend's pretty flight, till I was alarmed by its tragic ending. However, thank God ! it's no worse," he said, as he now bathed my forehead with cool refreshing water brought by a servant. "The cut is not more than skin deep, also so well under the hair that it will be no disfigurement. You will soon be all right, Miss Sterling."

He patted my hand kindly, as he marked that another tear was beginning to follow its fellow in dolorous procession.

"By-the-way," he continued, after declining the help now somewhat ungraciously offered by the lady, "by-the-way, Mrs. Davenel, the name Sterling is so familiar to me. I wonder if your young friend is any relation of the poor Ned Sterling whom I used to

know now more than twenty years ago. He was such a nice fellow; but he would go and marry some pretty girl with no money, then went to vegetate on some foreign appointment, where he died, and we were very sorry to hear of his death. We all used to like him so much—the pleasantest companion! A truly charming man! Poor Ned! I wonder what became of his widow and no doubt half-a-dozen children. The eldest would be about the age of this young lady.”

“I think it must be my father of whom you are speaking. His name was Edward; he had a foreign appointment, and died in the Mauritius,” I said.

“Then it must be so,” replied Lord Garth. “I am truly glad to meet his daughter, even under such forlorn circumstances as these. I must see plenty of you. Lady Garth used to make quite a pet of your father, so you must come and know her. Mrs. Davenel must spare you to us for a few days, though I daresay she won’t like doing so. Are you paying a long visit here?”

It is impossible to describe the compressed anger in Mrs. Davenel’s tone as she answered—compressed because Earl Garth was her greatest neighbour, whom she did not wish to offend, before whom, now she

had got over her first annoyance, she did not wish to show more displeasure.

"Miss Sterling is not here on a visit; she is employed in teaching my granddaughter. I cannot, therefore, spare her from her duties. I regret, of course, I cannot oblige you and Lady Garth in this."

"But I don't see," he persisted, "why Miss Sterling being so busy in your house need make any difference in my plans. I think, on the contrary, it will make things pleasanter if on holidays she and my little friend Katherine may come to us. They will both be heartily welcome. Remember, I shall be quite vexed if they don't come."

Mrs. Davenel was forced to give a most unwilling assent to our going, to which she added the saving clause, "When it should happen to be convenient," as if she never meant that convenience to happen.

"It shall be convenient, please," laughed the old gentleman good-humouredly. "Now, Miss Sterling, you drink this wine my friend Horace has brought; it will bring a little colour into your cheeks."

I did as I was told. Never was stimulant more timely. The Dutch courage it gave enabled me to rise

from the sofa, restoring me momentarily to my wonted powers of reasoning.

"I am very glad to meet anyone who knew and liked my dear father. You have too been very kind to me, and I thank you so much," I said, putting out my hand to Lord Garth. I did not know whether it was etiquette to do so. I only knew I thought him very good, and my heart turned to him because he had known my father. He gave me such a hearty pressure as he again said that I must soon know his wife, who he was sure would take to me.

I then went up to Mrs. Davenel. I felt nerved to this by the kindness the others had shown me; but it was in a weak quavering tone I fear that I said: "Indeed, I am very vexed with myself, Mrs. Davenel, I ought never to come downstairs in that way; it was most clumsy of me, but I feared I should be late with my letter, so ran down quickly to be in time. Also I thought no one was in the house. I am sorry too, about the stand being broken; very sorry."

Mrs. Davenel muttered some words in reply, to this, I think, as ample an apology as I could make. I suppose she accepted it; but what she said I could scarcely make out, for I again felt faint, so turned to get away from them all as

quickly as possible, lest I should make another scene. In one moment Captain Davenel was at my side, and drew my arm within his, saying: "She is not fit to walk alone, so I will take her to her room, mother, and send someone to her."

He then led me from the hall. I had not liked him much before, but I could not help feeling his gentleness that day, it came so soothingly when his mother's harshness was cutting me so sore. I could not speak; but I think he understood. When we were in the schoolroom he placed me in the easy-chair, with a cushion behind my head.

I suppose it was his own poor health which made him so much more readily sympathize with suffering than his strong-bodied mother. After looking at me with a what-is-best-to-do-now-I-wonder sort of manner, he said softly: "Just rest quietly here till I send Mercy and Mrs. Tirrit to you. Tirrit is a capital woman for accidents; she used to patch and mend up poor Mary and me a dozen times a week at least. I will give her a wonderful pick-me-up I have by me, which will stop that pain of the head from which I see you are suffering. I can tell you are by the look

in your eyes. You will take the stuff I send you, will you not? it is not nasty."

It was so like coaxing a child, this last, that I smiled as I promised I would. Then, seeing he was turning to go, I involuntarily caught him by the sleeve of his coat, exclaiming:

"Captain Davenel, I don't mind the pain or the blow, or anything; but what I do mind is having vexed your mother so. I have tried so hard to please her in every way, but it just seems hopeless. Of course I was clumsy and stupid; but even to myself I do not feel as if I had been so terribly wrong, and yet your mother seems to think I am. You don't know how this distresses me."

"I can see it does," he answered kindly; "but you must not let it do so. My mother often gets angry like this; it is a little way of hers, which most foolishly no one opposes but myself. You see she is very primmy. Mary and Anastasia would not have dared run helter-skelter down those stairs, even when children, if they knew she was near, so no wonder she was furious at your doing it. Not that you were doing anything in the least wrong; it is only her nonsense. But I will make it all right with her, and you did all you could, for you made

a first-rate apology. In a few days it will all be forgotten."

"But that beautiful stand; I am so vexed it is broken."

"Bother the stand," he said hastily; "as if that signified in comparison with you. Why, all I can feel is, that it is a good thing you were not broken with it. You have no idea of the fright you gave me when I ran to pick you up, and saw you stunned and bleeding. You must not fidget about anything now; just trust to me to make my mother and the stand all right, and try not to worry."

"How is it you were not gone to Hurston Towers?" was my next query.

"Oh! a very simple reason. Lord Garth called to see my mother on business, so it was decided the others should go first and we follow an hour later. I think it was just as well for you, that there were people near to help you."

He had seemingly settled himself into a comfortable talking, which I felt would not do, so I remarked quietly:

"Then you and Mrs. Davenel are going now?"

He noticed the slight emphasis on the now, and that there was a half smile on my lips. He fairly laughed outright.

"You mean," he said, "I must not stay longer on this forbidden ground; but, surely, to-day it is not an unpardonable offence."

I forgot my pain in the energy of my answer.

"Oh no! I am only thinking of your kindness, you have been so good to me; and as regards that unlucky morning, do forgive my so giving way to temper; but though I did so too much, I was right, was I not?" I looked appealingly to him as I spoke. His face softened wonderfully as he answered:

"Indeed you were right, and I got a good lesson for my pains, though I can't say I liked it at the time. You certainly were very angry; those big eyes of yours flashed forks of lightning, and almost withered me as I stood there; but I think I deserved it. We are quite friends now, I hope," and he stretched out his hand to me. I put mine in his, with a glad feeling, as I responded:

"Yes, that we are." It was always wonderfully pleasant to me to be friends with people, even with the Captain Davenel whom till lately I had quite disliked.

A bright look came into his face, as he said:

"I will try to deserve your friendship, and will start by being good, so I won't stay longer now, though I would far sooner spend my afternoon on

that terrace than go to this horrid place—but I must not grumble: Your mission will be to teach Kitty and me to be good children, will it not?”

I did not feel that my mission was to teach him anything at all, but my head was throbbing too much for further speech. Seeing this, he took a kindly leave, promising to send me help at once.

In a few minutes, Mercy and the housekeeper, Mrs. Tirrit, bustled in with all sorts of remedies. If I had been Victoria Regina herself, I could not have been paid more attention to. Evidently Captain Davenel's orders were paramount in that household. I was fit for nothing but bed, I was so bruised and shaken, while unexpected bumps were developing themselves all over my surface. I caught one glimpse of myself in the mirror, and thought it was no wonder my ashy face, with its crimson stains, had frightened all but Mrs. Davenel's iron nerves. Mrs. Tirrit was an experienced dame in all vicissitudes which can happen to the human frame. She bandaged a sprained wrist with the utmost dexterity, and prescribed a warm bath.

“She must have one, Mercy, or she will be that stiff to-morrow she won't be able to turn.”

Presently every aching limb was refreshed by the soothing process, and soon after I was in bed. I

yielded to the quieting properties of the stuff sent by Captain Davenel, and fell fast asleep, nor did I awake for some hours ; not till long after Kitty was home and quietly at rest in her little bed.

My accident had no further worse effects than the "that stiff" Mrs. Tirrit had prophesied, and which even the warm bath did not avert. Also, I was a good deal bruised and disfigured, so I did not appear in public for a few days, but kept in my rooms with the child for my willing little nurse. I was not perhaps sorry to be out of Mrs. Davenel's way, till she should a little have forgotten my misdemeanour.

Kitty told me Lord Garth had sent to inquire how I was ; and one morning she appeared with a packet of new music, which her uncle said he would be so much obliged if I would practise, so as to play some of it when I next appeared in the drawing-room. I wondered if he knew that trying over, and learning new music, was always great enjoyment to me.

CHAPTER XI.

A PLEASANT DAY.

THE first time I passed through the hall, after I had recovered from my accident, I saw, to my great delight, the flower-stand apparently restored to its pristine glory—fresh exotics in it, of course ; the other poor things had been hopelessly injured, but the stand itself seemed a perfect mend.

I blessed Captain Davenel for this in my heart, feeling sure such speedy reparation must have been owing to his good management. I had seen Mrs. Davenel once during my temporary confinement to the schoolroom, when she came as usual for her weekly inspection of the progress in lessons. I could not fail to remark an extra chill in her manner, a sort of ill-concealed dislike as she looked me through and through, while she coldly asked how I was. After

then I never deluded myself again with any hopes of winning her regard.

Mr. Davenel greeted me with extreme kindness, the first morning I appeared at breakfast. Even his wife's presence did not check him. When he added, "We have quite missed you," pleased as I felt, I did not dare look to the tea and coffee end of the table, where sat, stiff and straight, the august mistress of the house.

The post-bag always appeared while we were at breakfast. It was altogether a very ceremonious affair; first of all, the "chief butler," portly Mr. Hughes, bore it in on a huge salver to Mrs. Davenel, who, choosing a key hanging among many others pendent from her girdle (so that she looked like an amateur jailer), slowly unlocked it. This done, the contents were sorted with careful deliberation, with, as it always seemed to me, most aggravating tardiness; then they were handed to the footman for distribution, who, with due decorum, marched solemnly round the table, giving unto each their portion. Captain Davenel had early struck against this arrangement, and had his own separate bag, which always waited his arrival. All this prim state chafed and fretted me, who was in a constant state of hunger for home news. I used to long to rush up and tear any familiar-looking

envelope away from the rest, so as not to have to wait so long.

One morning, one broiling July morning—for that first summer of mine at The Chase was the hottest I ever remember—the bag was unusually empty. A long letter for me from Lottie, at which I just peeped to see that all was well before I laid it aside for a leisure time; several for Mrs. Davenel—one or two of deeper interest than usual, as I could see by the extra corrugation of her brows as she bent over them.

Kitty nudged my elbow, whispering in my ears: “One of those letters has an Indian stamp; is it from father, I wonder? Oh! is there one for me?”

Mrs. Davenel read and reread her various epistles, then folded them up, replaced them in their envelopes, laid them by her plate the blank side uppermost, and proceeded quietly with her breakfast, making no comment, though she might easily have seen the eager wistful little face looking at her, the plate half pushed away, the food unwished for, in the intense longing for news of the loved father. I think it was those things which made Mrs. Davenel so specially unloved—she could not put herself in other people's places. Because Kitty could scarcely remember her father, who had left her when she was so young, Mrs. Davenel would persist that the child could not

have any affection for him, and that if she did profess any it must be affectation and pretence.

However, on this occasion, the little girl was not kept long in suspense, for Mr. Davenel had his letter too, which he had no sooner read than he looked up much pleased, at the same time tossing a wee note, with the fine superscription Kitty knew and loved so well, across the table to her as he exclaimed: "This is good news. Faulkner will be back before we know where we are; in a fortnight or three weeks from now he will be here. He speaks of seeing us all early in August. Katherine," he added, looking towards his wife, "surely your letter must have told you this news also."

"Of course it did," was the cold reply; "but I thought there was no need to blurt it out so immediately. Things are best first discussed in private."

"Maybe, maybe," he answered; "but you know I can't keep things in; I never can. I thought too of Kits' pleasure."

Nothing angered Mrs. Davenel more than "Kits." Kitty was much too familiar she considered; but "Kits!" no words could define her indignation when that pet name was used. The grandfather, more often than not, called the child so, when we were out on our rambles, but was generally most careful not

to do so before his wife. I suppose his joy at the welcome tidings made him forget, though the emphatic "Katherine," in her reply, soon brought his offence to his recollection.

"You are absurdly excited, Mr. Davenel. Really 'Katherine's' pleasure cannot be so very great at meeting a father who must be quite a stranger to her. It is positively silly to make such a fuss about it. We must hope that she will learn to love and obey him, as a child should her parent, after she has grown accustomed to him. It is impossible he can be dear to her as yet."

Oh! if she had only looked across the table towards her grandchild at that moment, even she could scarcely have said that. The little face was flushed, the blue eyes dilated, the lips quivering, the wee hand I held so tightly grasped under the table was trembling. One moment more and Kitty would have burst into a passion of tears, happy tears it might be, but I resolved they should not be shed there, with that cold woman looking on. I rose. "Mrs. Davenel," I asked, "may we go to the schoolroom now? We have both finished breakfast, and are a little behind-hand with lessons, so Katherine must make up for lost time."

This was a sort of speech which pleased Mrs.

Davenel; it was a Draco-like manifestation of duty, intensely grateful to her unbending soul.

Her "Certainly, you can go at once," had almost a gracious ring in it. We were soon out of the room, the door well closed behind us, and we out of ear-shot. Kitty flung her arms around my neck, and, sitting on the ground, I drew her to me, loving and caressing her, while she gave vent to the tears she had with difficulty withheld till then.

"How good you are to let me cry," at last she sobbed, "and not to scold me. You see there was the waiting so long for the letter, and then the joy; and then to think she does not believe I love him, how cruel of her!"

She again broke out weeping. I did not at first check her, for I knew we were not likely to be disturbed, as we were in a side passage, not often invaded. I, who could not remember my father, who had never known, but always longed for his love, felt my whole sympathy go out to the little thing who, in this great moment of her life, came to me the comparative stranger, because she had no one else she could turn to. Her emotion had spent itself. She lay in my arms, her fair hair tossed over my shoulders as she looked up at me, while I spoke gently and brightly of the happiness which

was coming to her, trying to tone down the over-excitement from which she was still suffering, when Captain Davenel drew near on his way to his tardy breakfast.

"Why, what's up?" he said; "has Kitty met with an accident this time, that you two have made yourselves into such a pretty group there?"

"Oh no," I half laughed; "it's right down good happy news we are suffering from, and no accident. Kitty's father is coming home in a fortnight."

"Still, I don't see why that should turn my little woman into a perfect Niobe," he rejoined, playfully stooping down and twining one of the fair tresses round his fingers.

"Uncle Horace," asked the child, looking up flushed and eager, "do say you are glad he is coming. Grandmamma looked cross, and soon stopped grand-papa's being glad. Auntie never spoke, she never does, and Miss Sterling is only glad for me. I want someone besides me to be glad he is coming, for his sake. No one believes either that I really care, except Miss Sterling."

"Poor little Kitty," he said tenderly, "I do believe you do care very, very much. I am also very glad your father is coming. He and I are first-rate

friends, and we will all be so jolly together, you'll see."

"Miss Sterling too," she said; "you must not leave her out."

"We won't be likely to do that," he answered; "you can't do without your good angel. But I think you are trying to crush your good angel quite flat. You had better stand up and liberate her. Yet I liked," he added, turning to me, "the seeing you both as I came down the passage. Do you know, Miss Sterling, you play the part of consoler far more gracefully than when you take on yourself the rôle of censor."

His voice had resumed its usual cynical tone as he concluded his sentence. My face crimsoned. I disliked him in his satirical moods, and particularly disliked any reference to that schoolroom scene. I rose from the ground, and, taking Kitty's hand in mine, remarked coldly :

"I think it is time we went to lessons, so we will not detain your uncle longer."

He stepped impetuously forward. "Indeed I did not mean to vex you. I do not know how it is that I am always so unfortunate, when my chief wish is to please you. I suppose I have always been spoilt, so to be disagreeable is my second nature; but indeed

I hate myself when I am so to you, who are so good, so patient, so—so—charming.”

Then, seeing I disliked the amende as much as the provocation, he pleaded :

“ You will never know how it distresses me to pain one I esteem as I do you, one whom——” he was going on, when just then we heard voices near, which told us we might be intruded on. He stooped, taking my hand in his, almost crushing it in his grasp as he said, “ Do try to think better of me than you do ;” and then turned abruptly away and left us.

Kitty was so absorbed by her own feelings, that she did not notice what passed ; while I, puzzled, surprised, uncomfortable, tried in the dull morning’s routine to forget a small incident which so disturbed me. I had seen a good deal one way and another of Captain Davenel since my accident, not that he ever came to the schoolroom at forbidden hours ; he attended scrupulously to my wishes in that respect, but I was now almost every evening in the drawing-room, and he had taken to joining us sometimes in our walks. I felt this was what his mother did not like, but found it impossible to prevent it. However, he had always been so simply friendly, that in no way had he made me feel uncomfortable till that morning.

But I knew he was a very variable, capricious man; something might have excited him just then which might not occur again, so I endeavoured to dismiss the matter from my mind as much as possible.

The weeks which ensued preceding Mr. Stewart's arrival may be described as difficult ones. Like the tale of bricks in the Old Testament days, the usual quota of lessons had to be fulfilled under all circumstances. It was quite unreasonable to expect the child to give her best attention, so I helped all I could to cram easily, and so satisfy our domestic Pharaoh, who gave so little and demanded so much. We had one very pleasant day during this waiting interval. Kind Lord Garth did not forget his promise to the child of his old friend. People said Lord Garth never had been known to forget or break a promise once made. So there came an invitation for Kitty and her governess to go to Compton Castle, and spend a long day there.

As a rule, I hate spending a "long day," which usually means that you and your hosts must talk to each other *volens volens* till you are heartily weary of one another. It would be a good plan if, during the "long day," there might be allowed a "retiring interval," an hour's solitude or so with a favourite

book, or merely the welcome rest of leaning back and silence. Then the rest of the "long day" might be borne. But no! it is not considered polite to give a moment's rest to yourself or others. "Dear So-and-so has kindly come to spend the whole day with me, so I must not leave her," the hostess says, stifling a yawn, and then she thinks: "But how wearisome she has become; surely she used not to be so tedious." The guest is not altered, though; neither of them is altered; it is only the terrible ordeal of the "long day" which has worn them both out, and which, I believe, has undermined many a friendship, unless it be one of those rare ones which is founded on a rock, and so will stand any ordeal whatsoever. I do not care, I repeat, for whole day festivities. Garden parties I enjoy; they are out of doors. Afternoon teas can be endured in very congenial company; but, excepting these, give me evening visiting in preference to all others; by then you have done, or ought to have done with the day's worries, your daily cares are, or should be packed away, you are prepared to amuse and to be amused.

However, there is no rule without an exception, and the long day at Compton Castle proved to be one. Certainly a visit to a grand historical old place,

where there are kindly genial people, is pleasant at all times, and our expedition to see Lord and Lady Garth was most enjoyable.

The invitation was so worded that a refusal could scarcely be; also Captain Davenel, who had lately been earlier at breakfast, and was so that morning, decided in his usual imperative manner that we must go, that Kitty was looking pale, and a whole holiday would do her good.

"They had best go in the dog-cart," he said, "and at eight I will call for them in the mail phaeton and drive them home. I must be in Compton that day, and the Castle is just in my way."

Mrs. Davenel frowned; it was evidently a plan not to her taste.

"There is no need you should trouble yourself to fetch them, Horace. I prefer the dog-cart should wait, and seven is quite late enough for them."

"The dog-cart must return," he replied; "there is a great deal of work going on in the stables, and the men are wanted, so the groom had best get back as soon as possible. I want, too, to see the Garths. I have to discuss some things with him. I think the whole plan, as I have arranged it, by far the best."

He spoke quicker than usual; his tone quite an

eager one ; but when, attracted by the change from the ordinary drawling voice, I glanced towards him, I did not meet his eyes, for it seemed as if he sedulously avoided looking towards where Kitty and I sat.

Mrs. Davenel finally assented, as in the end she always did, to any proposition of his ; but her manner was both reluctant and ungracious in a more than ordinary degree, and I detected a furious glance shot in my direction.

I, of course, had to be perfectly passive in the matter. It was not for me to do anything but to submit to what was arranged. A virtual *tête-à-tête* drive with Captain Davenel of more than an hour seemed to me a strange arrangement ; but as it came about through no doing of mine, I felt somewhat pleased at the idea.

The mail phaeton would be a delightful mode of progression. I had often longed to sit behind those splendid chestnuts, to tear through the air at the rapid pace with which they usually whirled the lightly-built vehicle. Also, I no longer objected so much to Captain Davenel's society. I felt intuitively that I had him almost as well "in hand" as he had his chestnuts. He had let his veil of cynicism drop aside sometimes when with me, and under it I saw the kindly, though always selfish, undisciplined nature ;

but I knew a word or look from me would at once repress in him anything which I did not like. So it was with a certain amount of content that I looked forward to the drive in the cool of the summer evening, as we three should come homeward through the charming park-like glades which formed the connecting links between the two vast properties of The Chase and Compton Castle.

Even the consciousness that Mrs. Davenel was irate, and more so with me than with her son, though I was so innocent of all blame in the matter, could not prevent my being very cheery and bright when Kitty and I ensconced ourselves in the same high dog-cart which had brought me, a timid and nervous guest, to The Chase only a few months previously. I was not naturally shy, and had a liking for strangers' society. I had, as a rule, experienced so much kindness in my life that I did not expect the contrary. It was, too, more easy to me to like than to dislike. I saw no reason why people should not be nice to me. In all this I was, maybe, very unknowing of the world; but if I had my life to go over again, I would rather have, perhaps, that over-confidence in the goodness of my fellow-creatures than be doubting and mistrusting as so many are. Even Kitty could not appreciate a holiday more than I did, I who never

really loved teaching. I liked too to feel that it was my own real self, Muriel Sterling, and not Miss Sterling, the governess, who for that day, at least, was going to pay a visit on her very own account.

I am always glad I so enjoyed that one bright day. Life's troubles so soon came to me, and never again could I be happy, with such entire freedom from care, as I was then. How we enjoyed the drive! While we were still in the domains of The Chase, we skirted along the edge of the cliff high above the blue sea, which lay in dancing waves beneath us. Then came a short stretch of hot dusty road, to be endured, but not to be enjoyed; but this was not of long duration, for soon whirling through the lodge gates of the Castle, we drove for miles under the refreshing shade of groups and avenues of oaks, elms, and beeches, now starting a herd of deer, who bounded away at our approach; now crossing some lonely streams, or passing cattle, great horned beasts which I was told were the finest in the county, till at last we emerged in front of the stately Castle, and stopped beneath the huge portico.

It was a very grand house, but I could not love it as I did The Chase. About the home in which I now lived there was a curious irregularity of design,

and mingling of styles, which to very methodical lovers of architecture might be distasteful, but which to me were always picturesque. One bit of the house was as it were grafted on to another, according to individual caprice; but yet the whole was so mellowed by time, so softened by the beautiful ivy and creepers which threw their graceful mantle over the old walls, that the effect was wonderfully cheerful and home-looking. Though really an immense building, it never oppressed me by its size, for it had the aspect of a splendid cottage with the proportions of a mansion. Compton Castle, on the contrary, looked what it was, a show place; being very great and enormous, regular, trim, and complete; battlements where they should be, towers and turrets in tidy juxtaposition, etc. It had acres of state-rooms, which it was a fatigue to walk through. The family hated these apartments, and shunned them on all but ceremonious occasions, living when they were by themselves, or with only a select few, in three or four cozy rooms with simple furniture, which were never shown to ordinary visitors who liked to stare at the stiff formality of the uneasy velvet and satin chairs and couches, the monstrous beds, the hideous tapestry, and still more

hideous family portraits, which bedecked the rooms thrown open to the public gaze.

To all lovers of royalties and royal relics, these apartments were replete with the deepest interest. Were there not here the swaddling clothes of Queen Mary, of sanguinary memory; the aprons bordered with silken snails, once worn by the regal old maid of England; the ivory back-scratchers, used by Queen Anne herself when her princely shoulders needed its anti-tickling propensities; the pocket-handkerchief with which the first gentleman (?) of Europe blew his nose on the coronation day; and countless other interesting relics enshrined beneath glass cases, and reposing on silken cushions? No doubt the people who came to see these interesting objects were much edified, and so these grand rooms had their use. Certainly the pictures in the huge gallery, of which there was a fine collection, were most charming to see; but, excepting these, I felt at Compton Castle as I do in almost all our great houses, that the real enjoyment is in the parks and gardens, where nature and art unite to make a perfect whole, and where no disappointment can be felt.

We only obtained a fleeting glance at all the splendours around us, as we were led to a very

cheerful, simple-looking octagon boudoir, opening on to a soft green sward, in the midst of which a pretty fountain played its delicate rippling music. Here, busy writing, sat the lady of the house, a sweet, yet almost homely-looking dame, who greeted us with a kindly welcome, which seemed at once to waft me back to Durnford, and to my mother. At first she spoke chiefly to Kitty, and then she said: "Now I want to know my old friend's daughter thoroughly; so go, little Kitty, to yonder table, where you will see some picture-books and find plenty to amuse you. You cannot go out just yet on account of the heat. By-and-by some young friends are coming to cheer us all."

Kitty dearly loved pictures, and was soon absorbed in looking at them; also was well out of earshot.

Lady Garth began by asking me most kindly, not in the least in Mrs. Davenel's style, after my home and home people. Her beautiful blue eyes, which in her youth had won for her the name of "Angel-eyes," invited to confidence, and I was soon talking to her with singular unreserve. Then, too, she had known and loved my father, and told me a great deal about him. At last she said: "You know I thought your mother most winning, the only time I saw her, just before they sailed for the Mauritius. I should like much to meet her again.

I can easily believe that she has shown wonderful strength and courage in her difficult life. I judge from what you tell me of her, from what I fancy I see in you, for it is early days really to know you; and, most of all, I judge from the mere fact of your being here."

"My being here!" I echoed in surprise.

"I mean," she answered, "her letting you go out as governess. A selfish, uncontrolled woman would have shrunk from the pain it would have given her to part with you for a position which is sometimes not a happy one, would have let you stay at home in idleness, or learn the lowering lessons which dependence teaches us. But she, on the contrary, has proved herself of the right stuff, for she has encouraged you to be a brave worker; to help yourself and her too. It cost her more than it cost you when she sent you away from her."

I have no doubt Lady Garth was right; but I felt when she said this last, much as a child feels when she is told that it is harder to teach than to learn. I had so often thought that to remain at Durnford with any amount of trouble must be easier than the leaving it. However, my heart warmed to my new friend for her kind words as I answered:

"I am very fortunate in having found work which is so easy as mine is. I am not, however, worthy to be called a brave worker; my life here is not great enough for that. Of course, there are drawbacks, but there must be those everywhere I suppose."

I then hinted to her that I found it so difficult to do right always and not to be misunderstood. I longed to speak more plainly, but I felt I could not tell Lady Garth that Mrs. Davenel worried me dreadfully, and that Captain Davenel had been my greatest trouble.

At last Lady Garth said:

"You are right to be careful in not saying much about the people among whom your lot is now cast: I commend your reticence on the point. Perhaps even I would not have encouraged you to say the little you have said, excepting that I take a great interest in you for your father's sake. When Lord Garth came home the other day he related to me the whole scene of your accident, and he and I fully understand that there must be many difficulties for you. We both of us wish much that you may win successfully through them all; and if we could help you we would gladly do so. I am sure you are always perfectly open and straightforward, and

obedient to even implied wishes. These are the only ways by which you can hope to avoid giving offence. Though do not be discouraged, if even, after trying your best, you seem to fail. You know that 'it must needs be that offences come.' "

I looked up in Lady Garth's kind face, and felt how much she spoke like mother, and what good it would do me to open my heart to her; then a sudden impulse came to me, and I could not help saying:

"I fear I can never hope to escape giving offence, and it is that which dispirits me so. Lady Garth, may I be open with you? may I tell you some of my troubles? I will try not to speak against people; indeed, I do not wish to do so, but I want help, and there is no one to give it me. My mother is far away, so it is useless writing to her; besides, in writing you can't make people understand as you do in speaking." Then, fearing I was asking too much, I stopped; and added: "I mean only, of course, if you would not dislike it too much."

Lady Garth thought a moment, then answered:

"I do not like even the seeming to pry into my neighbour's affairs, and especially in a case like yours, but you are the child of one I knew so well in former days, and seem just now rather friendless;

also Lord Garth begged me to assist you if I could, so you may say what you like, and it shall be quite sacred with me."

I thanked her, and then asked her advice respecting many things; I even ventured to refer to Captain Davenel, not, of course, speaking of the attentions which I feared he was beginning to pay me. I was not conceited enough to refer to them, but merely told her how his haunting his little niece and me in our walks, etc., was, I feared, contrary to rules, and that it was very difficult to repress him. I also told her how Mrs. Davenel was beginning to notice, and getting colder and more fault-finding with me every day. I mentioned the arrangement for the drive home that evening, and said I quite dreaded the return to The Chase, knowing she would be displeased with me, even though I was not, and could not, be to blame for the plan.

Lady Garth seemed to understand all with great quickness and intuition.

"I am sure it is all very difficult for you," she said. "You see, Horace Davenel, being an idle man, and delicate, has much too much time on his hands; so Kitty and you, being both of you young and lively, serve to amuse him. It is very inconsiderate of him, however, doing things which may

bring you into trouble ; but he has been trained to think of nobody but himself, so we cannot blame him for his selfishness. I do not see how one could expect him to be otherwise. Do you like him ?” she asked, in her quick penetrating way, fixing her eyes on me the while.

“At first I did not like him at all,” I answered frankly, “for I could not endure his sarcasm, and even now I dislike his manner to his mother and his sister; but I confess since he was so good-natured when I had that accident, I have grown to like him better. Still, I never feel as if I could be quite at ease with him, and to-day his plan of driving us home, because it pleases himself, will, I know, make things difficult for me afterwards; and this is so selfish on his part that my liking is only half liking after all.”

Lady Garth seemed much pleased with my reply. “That’s right,” she said, patting my shoulders. “Keep your eyes well open; let the liking remain only ‘half liking.’ Mrs. Davenel makes a mistake in not having more people to the house to amuse him; she should have them whether he likes it or not. It is very natural, in his extreme dulness, he should turn to you *faute de mieux*.”

This was not, as regarded me, a very flattering way

of putting the matter, but I understood how and why Lady Garth said it, and, like a sensible girl, I showed her I did. "Of course," I replied. "I know he only talks to me because he is dull; but is it wrong of me to like it a little?"

"Not wrong at all. I think a girl is unnatural if she does not like to please and be pleased; but you must be more careful than other girls need be."

"Ah yes," I interrupted, somewhat bitterly I fear. "If I were staying at The Chase I might talk to and walk with Captain Davenel, and no one would find fault; but the 'governess' must be different to other people—must be still, and cold, and repressed. It is so difficult for me to be so. I do so want to enjoy myself and be like other girls."

"Of course you do; and so you may be, when you are at home, and even when you are here," Lady Garth said kindly; "but at The Chase you must just act up to the life God has placed you in—be the sensible quiet woman, rather than the lively girl. Do not try to step out of your position, which, my dear, is no ignoble or mean one. I honour governesses—good governesses—very much. Theirs is a very high office, a very noble work in life.

Many a good wife and mother may trace her first right impressions, her first noble high views to the teaching and influence of her governess. I would rather be as you are than be a useless fine lady. Think of what you may do there," finished Lady Garth, pointing to Kitty.

"Yes, indeed. I do wish to do all I can for her; I love her so," I said warmly. Then, still being resolved to air all my grievances, I went on, though I fear I must have been wearisome to my kind auditress. "Do you think I can hope to make Mrs. Davenel like me? It would make such a difference to me if I thought I pleased her."

"I cannot give you much hope," said Lady Garth. "I have known Mrs. Davenel many years now, and it is difficult for her to like anyone. Her love for her son excludes, or seems to exclude, all other feeling in her. But I do think if she sees you always act honourably, and strive to please her, she will in time trust you; and you must be content with that. I have a liking for Mrs. Davenel—she interests me. That very passionate, almost idolatrous, love of hers for Captain Davenel proves there is deep feeling in her, and the day may come when this feeling may show itself to others besides him. I often hope she

may be yet brought to see that we should not spend our affections on only one object, but, in humble imitation of our Divine Master, should diffuse them on all around us."

"Do you think she could ever change?" I said quickly. "She seems now so fixed in her hard nature. It is difficult for the old to change. I feel as if she could never alter. You must indeed be hopeful to think any improvement could come to her."

I scarcely realized, till the words gave shape to my feelings, how deep was the dislike which all these months had been growing up in me towards Mrs. Davenel. Lady Garth looked surprised at my vehemence, and though I felt ashamed, still I would rather she should know what I really thought—should know the worst of me.

"I cannot say, of course," she answered, "whether she will ever change; but I know this, that she may if it be God's will, and He always wills our good, if only we will let Him guide us. I see, my dear, that you rather follow the fashion in not much liking Mrs. Davenel."

"I am afraid I do not like her at all," I said.

"Then try to," was the prompt reply. "Just think how different everything will be to you if you strive to feel kindly towards her, to feel for her, to think of your own faults rather than be always thinking of hers. Never forget her when you say your prayers."

"Pray for her!" I said; "why, I pray, of course, that I may do my duty by her, but I never thought of praying for her. She does not need my prayers."

"We all need earnest sincere prayer, and are the better for it. I don't suppose she is an exception to the rule. Besides, I am very sure of one thing, that you want the help to yourself which praying for her would be to you. We can't go on disliking people if we truly pray for them. Just you try the experiment. If you do I truly believe you will feel much gentler to Mrs. Davenel, will be much more ready to make excuses for her and to make fewer for yourself."

Lady Garth stopped. The words were sharp and to the point, touching at the very root of bitterness which had been growing up within me; but they were said so gently that I only felt their loving-kindness. I told her I would try, and then for a

little while we were silent; indeed, for a few minutes I was left to myself, as she was called out of the room, and in those minutes I thought very deeply over what she had said.

CHAPTER XII.

A WALK BY THE SEA.

WHEN Lady Garth returned she began talking again at once.

"I have been thinking, Miss Sterling, about this idea of Captain Davenel's driving you and Kitty home, and I do not think it an advisable one. Mrs. Davenel gave in because she dares not oppose him ; but she is, as you say, sure to be vexed about it. I have thought of a plan which will make things right, though it will, I am sorry to say, take you away from us sooner than we had intended. But you must soon come again. I will myself drive you to The Chase about six o'clock ; Captain Davenel can equally have his talk with Lord Garth, and then can drive himself home," she added, with a twinkle in her eyes, as if she enjoyed the thought of his annoyance at finding us already gone.

Of course it was a very good plan, and might prevent much trouble for me, so I acquiesced at once; and yet I felt a little disappointed, for I had been looking forward to the drive. However, I trusted Lady Garth did not perceive I was, and apparently she did not, as she went on to other topics.

"I am so glad to see Kitty Stewart look so much more childlike, brighter, more natural, and even stronger than she used to do. I can see you make her thoroughly happy."

"I try to," I answered; "but just now she is extra happy, for very soon she will have her father with her again."

"Her father, Faulkner Stewart, in England again! I am glad," cried Lady Garth with such pleasure that I could not help exclaiming:

"It seems as if everyone liked Mr. Stewart. How wonderful it is! Mr. Davenel, Captain Davenel, even Miss Davenel—who is usually so indifferent—the very people about the place—all so delighted he is coming home; and now you. He must have the power of winning all hearts."

"I think he has," she answered. "I have wondered myself at it, when I have seen how much he is liked. It is certainly not his personal appearance,

for he is not handsome; yet he attracts more notice than many men who are. When he is in the room one feels drawn to listen to him, more than to anyone else. He has great conversational powers, has much kindliness and tact, so that people are always turning to him in their difficulties. Then, too, his wit is so spontaneous—so free from the ill-nature of sarcasm or bitterness. He has that great and rare charm, a pleasant voice, which gives enjoyment both in music and singing. He is almost too charming to women, for he always seems to defer to them and appreciate whatever gifts they may possess. I truly believe he is unconscious both of his influence over others and also of his great powers of attraction. If he knew his powers it would scarcely be right to exercise them as he does—or rather did.”

I pondered. This description was much what I imagined of him, but the thought came to me, as it had done before: “Can anyone who is a universal favourite, who is liked of all men, be really sincere?” I ventured to say this to Lady Garth. She said she had asked herself this question when she had heard everyone speak well of Mr. Stewart; but as she knew more of him she had seen it was part and parcel of the man to interest himself in people, to adapt himself to each individual nature, extracting for his

own pleasure the best there was in that nature, and then passing on to others with almost equal interest and pleasure.

"Has he much heart?" was my next query. Kitty's father had always interested me; and I was glad to hear about him, especially now we should so soon meet.

"Yes, I think so. His affection and deep grief for his wife proved it, though her love was greater for him than his for her; also his affection for his unknown daughter shows he has great feeling. How much of the quick sympathy is true I cannot say. Any way, he used to be a most fascinating man; women who had the good sense to take his attentions as meaning nothing special, experienced great and thorough pleasure in his society, and used to be altogether friends with him. You will be sure to see a good deal of him, and will be sure to like him and will think him very kind."

Here we were interrupted—much to my regret, for the subject interested me—by Lord Garth, who came in in a rough country suit, looking hot and tired, but was full of kindly greetings as he asked if I had had any more tumbles, or broken any more valuable property. "You would not think, Mary, to look at that small woman, what a terrible break-all she is;

quite a dangerous person to have in a household. She bowled over a weighty flower-stand as if it were a mere nothing. I must inspect that wound, Miss Sterling ; I want to see whether I made a tidy mend of it."

I laughed, assuring him his ministrations had been as successful as they were kind, and lifted my hair to show him what a slight scar was left as a reminder of my awkwardness. The gong now sounded, and we went in to luncheon in another—not state—room. It was a most informal meal ; a few guests staying in the house straggled in. No punctuality was required at the Castle, except of course at dinner, when its master never waited a second for anyone except his wife, who however had scarcely ever been known to tax his patience in that or in any other way.

It was pleasant to me to be able to talk as unconstrainedly as I liked. I had fallen into a chronic habit of looking up towards Mrs. Davenel's end of the table to see whether or not I was infringing any of her rules and laws ; so the relief was very great with which I here met Lady Garth's pleasant face, and her evident pleasure in my enjoyment of her husband's jokes.

After lunch, my host insisted on himself showing

me over the house. "You shall hurry through what everyone sees, and then I will introduce you to a few things reserved only for my special friends." So we rambled on from one huge room to another, which he made interesting, not after the cut-and-dried fashion of the housekeeper style of narration; but by giving me this remembrance of old times, or that recollection of boyhood, and he found in me a ready listener. "Your father was particularly fond of this room when he used to stay with us," he said once, and from that moment my interest in what I saw was much augmented. I paused before one portrait, quite a modern one, representing a young man in a hunting costume, with a handsome but weak irresolute face, yet having in it a likeness to his lordship. "That is my son," he remarked briefly, with a momentary cloud on his face, as he passed on to point out something else to me. I afterwards heard that all their children had died young, save this one, who from weakness, more than from intentional vice, had given them much trouble, winding up a foolish dissipated career by marrying a woman, respectable enough, but far below him in station. This had been a bitter trouble to his parents, who could have nothing in common with their daughter-in-law.

They were, however, good to her, and made much of their grandchildren, trying to raise them higher than their mother—who possessed a common order of mind—could do. All this made the old couple cling to each other in a way beautiful to see, feeling as they did that outside their own good and useful lives there was so much weariness and disappointment.

When it was cooler we had some famous games of tennis—a great treat to me, who had been so long debarred from it. I was feeling I had regained the old cunning in my right hand when Lady Garth, with real regret in her voice, told me we must go, as the pony-carriage was waiting. Kitty looked terribly blank when she found we were not to wait for her uncle. I felt a little blank too, but determined not to show it, so my hostess and I kept up a cheerful talk on all sorts of subjects as we drove through the park. Just as we neared the lodge gates we saw a huge cloud of dust whirling towards us from the Compton direction.

"I am sure that's Uncle Horace," cried Kitty, jumping up to see better.

She was right, and before we emerged from our leafy shelter, the phaeton drew up close to us, the horses flung back on their haunches with the energy

with which their driver pulled them in when he saw who we were. Of course we also stopped. Flinging his reins to his groom, Captain Davenel was soon standing by us.

"How do you do, Lady Garth?" he exclaimed; "I hope you are well. But I do not understand how it is Miss Sterling and Kitty are driving with you. It was quite settled they were to wait for me to bring them home. I have hurried from Compton on purpose."

He spoke very rapidly, truth to tell rather angrily. Lady Garth answered with excessive quietness, but again, with that twinkle in her eyes which was always there when she was mistress of, and enjoying the situation.

"I am so very sorry if you are disappointed, Captain Davenel; but, indeed, I felt I wished to enjoy my young friend's society to the last moment, also I want to see your mother, so I thought it would do just as well if I took them home. Do drive on to the Castle. Lord Garth is in, and will be delighted to see you; you must stay and dine and sleep. I can fetch back from The Chase anything you may require in the way of toilette."

All this was so excessively polite that it seemed impossible to oppose it; nevertheless a heavy frown

gathered on Horace Davenel's brow, as he listened to her. I could not help thinking he only wanted the silver hair, and lace cap, also the absence of the moustache, to be his mother in *propria persona*, so startling was his resemblance just then to that oftentimes wrathful dame.

"You are very good, of course," he muttered; "but it is always a pity to alter arrangements; my mother certainly did not expect them home till nine."

"I will make that all right with her," said my lady, still more quietly than before.

"But I know," he persisted, "they wished to drive in the phaeton, and I don't like to disappoint Kitty. Miss Sterling, if you and the child would get into my carriage now, it will, I am sure, save Lady Garth trouble if I drive you home. I came back on purpose for you."

I did feel so sorry he appealed to me; however, I could not but answer: "You have been most kind, Captain Davenel, but I think we must abide by Lady Garth's plan now."

He looked furious, but when Lady Garth, with a tone in her voice which meant decision, said: "Yes, I think things had better remain as they are," Captain Davenel felt he could make no further objection.

"Then," he said, "as you don't want me, I shall go back to Compton. It was with difficulty those fellows at the barracks let me go, and I may as well spend the evening with them. I am obliged to you, Lady Garth, for your invitation, but you see I cannot accept it."

He spoke with the utmost haughtiness, his face white with anger, then raising his hat, with a cold "Good evening" he jumped into his carriage, turned the horses, and was off at lightning speed down the road from whence he had just come. We drove on in silence for some time. I felt extremely distressed, and I believe looked so; for apart from the real wish I had for the drive, I could not bear to vex one who, even though it might be in a selfish way, had been so kind to me; also, I knew Mr. and Mrs. Davenel intensely disliked his dining with the mess. Since his illness, late hours, inordinate smoking, high play, and more drinking than was needful, were all most prejudicial to him, acting like so much poison in their effects on this delicate wilful man, and were invariably succeeded by days of irritability and suffering. Kitty's eyes were full of tears, and even Lady Garth looked uncomfortable. At last she broke the silence which was becoming oppres-

sive, speaking to me so low that Kitty could not hear.

"I think we have all a wet-blankety sort of feeling over us, but I am sure it will come all right. Certainly I did not think he would take it so seriously, and never foresaw that he would return to Compton. He generally so likes coming to us, that I was convinced a pleasant evening with us would make amends. But he is just a spoilt child, and cannot bear the least contradiction. Are you very sorry about this, my dear?" she finished, turning to me with a half smile, and one of her quick looks. I answered, perfectly frankly :

"I am sorry to have annoyed him so, as I believe he meant it kindly, and I am vexed he has gone back to Compton ; those late hours always make him ill."

"So am I vexed too," she answered ; "but still, you must be thought of as well as he ; and if Mrs. Davenel has not the courage to prevent your having an almost *tête-à-tête* scamper through the country late in the evening with her son, I have—and there's an end of it," said my lady, whipping on the ponies till they went at a famous rate.

Presently she looked up at us both with a bright smile. "Now don't fret, either of you ; this is not

the first contest your uncle Horace and I have had, Miss Kitty, nor will it be the last. But he is never vengeful, his anger does not last long; we shall soon be good friends again."

Lady Garth was right, there was no use in fidgeting over what was done for the best, though just now it did not seem successful; so we put our annoyance aside, and the rest of the drive passed off fairly well.

Mrs. Davenel was evidently well pleased to see us under such safe chaperonage. A weary pained look crossed her face when she heard her son was passing the evening at the barracks; still, that seemed better to her than the dread which was evidently getting hold of her, that her adored Horace was paying attention to the "governess."

I truly believe that had Lady Garth not intervened and stopped the drive Mrs. Davenel so hated, my days at The Chase would have been numbered, or made so that I should have been compelled to number them myself, rather than endure much that would have been too disagreeable to bear. Perhaps it might have been better for me had it been so, but it was fated that my life in Northshire was to go on to the bitter end. My new friend managed her explanations

with such tact that Mrs. Davenel could not but be pleased.

"Miss Sterling and Kitty, you see, have driven home with the old woman in preference to the more frisky arrangement, and I daresay Captain Davenel was glad to be able to fulfil his engagement at Compton. I suppose he is obliged sometimes to go through the *peine forte et dure* of a dinner with that stupid mess."

A curious softness came into Mrs. Davenel's face; she evidently felt the delicate sympathy which glossed over what was painful, and made things seem natural and simple. "You are always most kind, Lady Garth—truly kind. And I am obliged to you, Miss Sterling," she said, turning to me more gently than was her wont; "you did right to come back earlier. You and Kitty can now go and take off your things."

After a pleasant farewell, and oh! how true a promise on my part that I would go again to Compton Castle when I could, we left the room; I feeling in the midst of all the late vexation the happiness of having gained a friend—one to whom, from her position, and from the distance she lived from The Chase, I could not perhaps go for every trifle, but one who nevertheless would, I was sure, do

her best to help me and give me good advice should I have need to go to her.

My conversation with her had given me much to think over; it had both cleared and simplified my life. Till now I had shrunk lazily, maybe, from any close inner investigations; but that evening after Kitty had gone to bed I looked at my life and future actions from every point of view. I soon came to the resolution that though I would continue to be nice and pleasant to Captain Davenel—indeed, I had no wish to be otherwise—still I would be far more decided than heretofore in not letting myself be drawn into *tête-à-têtes* or whispered talks. I would be still more careful in so arranging my walks with Kitty that he would find it most difficult to find us. The country round fortunately gave us ample variety for our excursions, and as he never joined us while his father was with us, we need only increase, not diminish, our rambles with the dear old man.

I frankly acknowledge that, had Captain Davenel in any way captivated my fancy, I might have found it much more difficult to make my good resolutions and adhere to them, but I felt sure within myself that the liking I was beginning to feel for him would never be stronger than liking. His caprices and

fitful temper always banished any warmer sentiment which might have arisen; also, I could not forget that he had once wished me to deceive. I knew, too, that only a much stronger, more disciplined nature than my own would ever have the power to fix me to itself. I must "look up," and this I did not do with Captain Davenel. I was very glad I was so fancy free, and almost hoped it might be long before this freedom left me; and then I laughed at myself for perhaps attaching importance to attentions only paid from idleness and ennui.

I resolved, and perhaps from higher nobler motives than had yet actuated me, to obey Mrs. Davenel's wishes more completely—even to strive to think them reasonable. In direct fulfilment of which good intentions, I on the next day did not indulge in even passing irritation when she overworried about Kitty's (as she thought it) insufficient progress in learning. Perhaps I was helped to this patience by seeing the troubled look on her handsome face. I had heard that her son had not returned home till an early hour in the morning; that he was reported to have caught a feverish cold and to be suffering from headache; and that he had not yet left his bed. I knew that all this meant great discomfort for his mother, as nothing pleased or satisfied him when he was

ailing. When Mrs. Davenel had finished her exhortations, questions, and rebukes, she lingered, as if she had something to say, yet could not make up her mind to say it. I felt sure it might be something about her son and me, and regretted much she did not speak, when, after a long pause, she left the room with the words unuttered. I think if she had been frank with me it would have been much wiser. I should then have been able to plead her authority, should have known exactly what she wished me to do, and not to do; also it might have brought about a better understanding between us; but she could not bring herself to trust in me.

I heard afterwards that Lady Garth had praised me most highly to her, begging her to have more reliance on me. She had also ventured to hint that it was a pity The Chase was so quiet, as both Captain and Miss Davenel must want variety; she had done this half laughingly, but Mrs. Davenel had understood what she meant and, wonderful to relate, took the hint.

So The Chase was soon filled with merry young people, the corridors and rooms echoing to the sound of pleasant voices.

Poor Mrs. Davenel detested this invasion beyond description. Anastasia also was like a fish out of

water, for she was too well drilled and disciplined, too saddened by the memories she loved to cherish, to take pleasure in the gay society brought around her. Mr. Davenel, however, enjoyed it thoroughly; he delighted in young people, and in being able to cut his little jokes when well out of his wife's hearing. I fancy Captain Davenel also liked it; but on the one or two occasions on which we met in the ensuing week, he plainly showed that he had not forgiven me for doing as Lady Garth wished. His manner was like ice, and he rarely looked at or addressed me. I was sorry for this; but, faithful to my good intentions, instead of showing him, as I longed to do, that I regretted having vexed him, I emulated his stiffness, so that no cavalier or dame in the stiffest and most stately era of courtly life could have been more ceremonious and frigid than we two were to one another.

Mrs. Davenel, who often watched us, was evidently well content with the change in affairs; she became more cordial to me. Once, when her husband ventured to make a feeble joke on my "sterling" value, she responded with severe graciousness, putting on one of those smiles which sat so uneasily on her face, that they almost seemed as if they hurt her:

"Yes, I do think her name sometimes fits her very well." Then, fearing lest I should be uplifted by too much praise, she resumed: "Kitty is stooping more than ever to-day; it seems quite useless my asking you to see to it, Miss Sterling. It really is careless."

I made no answer; indeed silence was generally the best reply to Mrs. Davenel's rebukes, and what she most preferred.

The first few evenings of the social invasion passed without my being asked into the drawing-room, where Kitty told me they were very cheerful with music, billiards, and even games. "They talk of having dancing and charades when Uncle Horace is better."

"Is he not strong yet?" I asked, with the kind interest I always now felt in him; which was benevolent on my part, for, but for him, I should have been allowed my modest share in the fun; indeed, if he had not been so angry, he would have insisted on my presence.

"Oh no," the child answered; "he coughs dreadfully, and seems far from well. Sometimes he is amused, but sometimes he looks so bored as if he did not care for anything or anybody. Last night he asked me how you were, and if you liked

games. I told him you were a better hand at games than any of them. I told him too that sometimes when any of us went into the hall you peeped at us from the gallery."

"Kitty! Kitty! you terrible child," I exclaimed in dismay, "you should never have told him that; there was no harm in my going there to watch you all, and to see the pretty dresses, but now that anyone knows of it, I shall never like to go there again, and above all I did not wish your uncle to know."

The child was distressed when she saw how really annoyed I was, but it did her no harm to see for once the inconvenience her indiscreet little tongue had occasioned.

"I am so sorry, dear Miss Muriel," she answered, "but indeed uncle Horace did not seem to mind your doing so, for he smiled and made me tell him exactly where you usually stand; so I told him you always hid yourself behind that big knight in armour near the stained-glass window. He asked me no more, but just nodded and told me to run away and not bother him any more."

Of course the consequence of this was that the next evening I never left the schoolroom. It seemed dreary as pleasant sounds of music and voices were wafted to me from the distance. Indeed I felt so

inclined to give way to a regular fit of discontent and grumbling that I rushed to the piano, and there worried out a very involved piece of music, which took every bit of me to bring to perfection—and so banished useless repinings.

The next day Kitty showed signs of a slight cold, so I could not let her out, but went for a solitary ramble by the sea. In passing round a sharp curve of the bay I came suddenly on Captain Davenel, and one or two other gentlemen, escorting some of the ladies in a scrambling walk. I bowed, and was passing them, when one of the girls, who had on several occasions made herself very pleasant to me, begged me to join them. I thought it would seem churlish to refuse, so walked on with them, and they one and all made themselves agreeable, all save Captain Davenel, who never opened his lips to me. I was discussing some point with one of the party, and not attending to my footsteps, when a heedless movement on my part nearly precipitated me from a high bit of rock, into a deep pool of salt water. The gentleman next me was tendering his assistance, when Captain Davenel, pushing him aside, took my two hands in his, and half lifted me once more into safety.

He lingered a longish moment before he released my hands, while a deep flush came over his face, I suppose

from the unwonted exertion. He looked half sadly, half gently, at me, as we stood there a little apart from the others, and there was in his face as if he would have said, "Do let us be friends again," only the remains of his pride forbade his speaking.

I cannot bear to be on bad terms with anyone, so remembering only my wish to conciliate, and not weighing my words, I said: "Please do not be so vexed about that drive. Indeed I felt I must do as Lady Garth wished."

A bright smile came into his eyes and lips as he quickly replied: "Then you were disappointed too, at the change in plans; you would have liked the drive with me, if it could have been."

He again seized my hand, holding it in a firm grasp, while he seemed to be assisting me in my climbing as we now moved on.

I got rather frightened, for my conscience told me that this was not following Lady Garth's advice; but unfortunately it was just my one great fault, that I could not help trying to get back into people's likings.—I could not bear to be unfriendly with anyone.

"Of course, Captain Davenel, I would have liked a drive in the phaeton, it would have been such a treat; I was sorry too Kitty was disappointed." Then I added, for I felt this was not all the

truth: "I daresay we should all have found it pleasant."

"Ah, that we should—at least one of us would—perhaps too pleasant," was the eager reply, as, before I could interfere, he half lifted me over a dangerous bit of footing. We were outstripping the rest, as, forgetful of his cough and weakness, he kept hastening me on as fast as he could.

But I felt this talk must not go on any longer, so finding myself on a smooth bare bit of rock, divested of that green slippery seaweed which makes even standing such a risky performance, I rescued my hand from his grasp and took my position firmly.

"We will wait here till your friends come up; and, I do not wish you to misunderstand me, I thought Lady Garth quite right to stop the drive, the idea of which I saw annoyed Mrs. Davenel. After all, it was only a tiny disappointment, and need not be thought of again." Then, seeing my composed answer chafed him, I added: "But I am sorry you were vexed; I do not forget how kind you were the day I was hurt."

"Kind! what did I do that was kind? Only let me do what I wish, and then you shall see how kind I can be. Why do you hold yourself

aloof from me?—why do you avoid me? I was a little annoyed after that throwing me over the other day, but I should have soon come round, only you stiffened up, and seemed not to wish to speak. Do you think I would ever really do anything to annoy you that you send me to Coventry so? Do you think I would let my mother vex you, my dear?" He paused, and changing his tone said less excitedly: "Why were you not in the gallery last night? I purposely made them all go into the hall for some stupid game or other, that you might watch them. But when I went to the corner where Kitty says you always go, you were not there; how was that?"

"I was vexed with Kitty for telling you that I went there," I replied, very thankful for the quieter turn to the conversation, also rejoicing to see the others approaching within earshot. "I hope I did not do anything wrong in going into the gallery; but the evenings are rather long sometimes, and it was very amusing to watch you all, you made such pretty groups. But I don't suppose I shall go there again."

"There, that's it," said the young man, in a provoked tone; "it is quite enough for me to wish a thing, for you to do just the opposite; you

are the most contrary woman I know; I believe you quite hate me."

"No indeed, I do not," I responded wearily. "I don't hate you, or anybody. I want only to do right, and it seems impossible to do so here. It just seems as if I can please no one. I wish I were at home," and the passionate longing seized me so strongly that my eyes filled with large tears as I thought what a relief it would be to get quite away from these difficult people, and be once more with my very own.

Captain Davenel looked distressed. He had seen me stormy, merry, icy, but he had never seen a symptom of a tender, or lachrymose mood before. Just then two of the stragglers stepped on to our platform. I half turned from them, as Captain Davenel, in his most nonchalant tones said:

"Look here, Miss Sterling, at that fine sea-anemone in this pool; it is just the kind you wanted for Kitty's messy collection of marine monsters; come here while I fish it out."

I gladly availed myself of the opportunity to escape observation, and recover composure. As we both bent over the miniature lake where the pretty zoophytes were enjoying existence after their dormant fashion, he said hurriedly, in a low tone:

"Of course you weary of us, and long for your home. I am not surprised we fail to make you happy as things are now; but if you will be friends with me I will make everything brighter for you. However, you will not be, and I must obey you, yet how hard you make obedience."

"How hard I make obedience! What do you mean?" I echoed, opening my eyes to their widest with surprise.

"I wonder if you do not understand, or if you merely pretend not to," he repeated impatiently; then seeing by my manner that I was really unconscious of his meaning, he went on more gently: "Do you not know—other women would, but you are not like most of them—do you not know that it is that reserve of yours which tempts me on? and that if you are silent your face is not—that if you say a cold or hard thing, those gentle eyes are contradicting you all the time—those pretty lips are provoking to—to——"

Here he floundered hopelessly both in his talk and in the pool, into which he had slipped in his excitement.

I felt half angry, half inclined to laugh at his absurdity, so, pursing up my lips the reverse of prettily, I said in a clear distinct voice: "I do not

care for sea-anemones much, Captain Davenel, they are so sticky, so you need not trouble to procure me one," and I turned to join the rest of the party; nor would I allow any further opportunity of *tête-à-tête* during the remainder of the stroll, which now led homewards. When once more in my own room, I blamed myself for many things I had said. Would nothing ever cure me of that foolish impulsiveness of mine? Why could I not remain stiff and cold as I had intended to be?—why did I let misplaced pity take such hold of me, and divert me from my good intentions?

Of course Captain Davenel only meant to honour me with a passing flirtation, and must be repressed still more strongly; but though I kept repeating the word flirtation to myself, there were looks and tones of his which haunted me and made me uncomfortable.

I kept to my own quarters for the rest of the day, devoting myself to Kitty, who, poor child, was in the most depressing stage of her cold, and wanted amusing.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE IMPROMPTU DANCE.

I WAS not altogether surprised when a summons came for me to go that evening into the drawing-room. During the walk dancing had been spoken of as a thing likely to occur, and so in that case I should be wanted to play. I dressed hurriedly, then going down placed myself in my usual quiet corner near one of the open windows, till my services should be required. The rooms were full; it was an impromptu affair; but many people had been asked on the spur of the moment, both to dinner and in the evening; so a tolerably large number of young people were collected, and I foresaw plenty of work for my fingers.

I could not help hoping in myself, that perhaps even I, might get a turn or two towards the end of the evening. I was very willing to cater for the

pleasure of others, but felt a not altogether unnatural wish to participate in it myself to some small extent. One or two of the ladies came up to me, talking most civilly to me; also, marvellous to relate, a gentleman, who had been one of the walking party—a small dark-haired man with a very cheerful face—walked up and begged me for a dance.

I shook my head, saying he must be content with my playing instead.

“But not all the evening surely?” he added.

“I do not know as to that,” I said; “but certainly I shall go on till I am told to stop.”

“But that will be both dull and tiring for you, I fear,” he said compassionately.

“Not nearly so much so as you would imagine,” I rejoined cheerfully, having no wish to seem like a martyr. “Of course dancing is pleasant, but playing for it is the next best thing. My fingers don’t tire easily, and it won’t be dull watching you all move about in obedience to my will—now fast, now slow, according to the music I shall serve out to you. Any way, it will be far better playing than sitting still doing nothing—that I could not bear.”

“I should think not indeed, though I doubt much

if you would be allowed to sit the whole evening doing nothing. I am sure your music will be first-rate to dance to; but I still hope that later on I may have the greater pleasure of dancing with you, than of merely listening to you."

With a bow he moved away, for just then Mrs. Davenel walked up to tell me I could now begin, as they were all waiting.

The dancing was to be in the library, which had been cleared for the purpose. It was generally used for small and early dances, the hall being too huge except for large balls.

As I left my seat to go there, I saw Captain Davenel had been standing quite close to me, and had evidently overheard what had been said; and, why I could not tell, he had as evidently been annoyed, for he looked as black as thunder, as he said to me *sotto voce*:

"I cannot think why my mother did not get the man from Compton to play; she usually does when we are more than the people in the house. I specially reminded her about it when a messenger went there this afternoon, and made sure he had come. It is a shame you should be victimized; I had intended quite differently."

"Never mind about it," I said. "I enjoy playing.

You don't know what a genius for dance music I have. I mean to outvie the man from Compton, who, I have no doubt, thumps, and is uncertain in his time."

"You are the veriest sunbeam that ever lived," was the rejoinder in less sulky tones, as he settled the piano-stool to my satisfaction. "I truly believe you would extract pleasure out of pain if you could. You always make the best of things."

Now that sort of compliment I did not mind one bit, though in this case it was a gross exaggeration I am afraid, for I was so longing to dance, and the content was therefore a good deal make-believe. I laughed, and gave him a little friendly nod of dismissal as I conned over the list of dances hastily scrawled down, which was placed there for me to work steadily through.

I began the first with as much dash and verve as I could throw into it. Horace still lingered, watching my fingers, till I exclaimed, "Now please go and set the ball rolling, Captain Davenel; is my beautiful music to be wasted?" when, seeming to catch some of the liveliness with which I now carefully interlarded my talk with him—finding it the best antidote for the sentiment I would not let him drift into—he went at last, and for several dances "did his duty," as he phrased it, by his guests;

though I thought the duty which consisted in dancing with sundry elegant handsome girls could not be so very distasteful after all. The piano was happily so placed that I could see all that was going on. Indeed it is a great mistake at a dance when it is not so; playing is so much easier, and more spirited when one can watch as well. I played almost entirely from memory, and I think my music gave satisfaction. I went on steadily. They were all so enthusiastic that there were but short pauses for rest. At last my fingers grew weary, or rather my brain became tired of the ceaseless whirling. I began to wish I could rest a little, and was preparing somewhat wearily to commence No. 6 in the list, when Captain Davenel's voice sounded again in my ears.

"I have been so good, I have done all you wished me to do, I have danced with all whom I need to, and have rested this last one purposely that I may enjoy the reward I now claim, which is this waltz with you. Miss Browne, the young lady who likes you so, has promised to play it. Here she comes to do so. Those clever little fingers must be tired even of the pleasure they have given. I am quite ready. Don't let us lose a moment of this dance."

It was a great temptation, and I did not see why I should resist it. I thought no one could

object to my having one turn. Lady Sarah Vernon's governess used to foot it among the best, so why should not I? Miss Browne good-naturedly said she was quite glad to play—it would rest her—and hoped I would thoroughly enjoy the dance. She almost turned me off the music-stool, and settled herself there as if she meant to be a fixture. I put on my gloves very contentedly, and took Captain Davenel's arm. A look of great pleasure came into his face, as he drew me towards the dancers. Anastasia, who had I suppose been watching us from afar, though I had not observed her, came hurriedly up to us.

"Horace," she gasped (Anastasia always gasped when extra flurried), laying her hand on his arm, "Horace, please don't; it is just what mamma never does like. She is quite willing that Miss Browne should play once or twice to rest Miss Sterling; but it is one of her rules that—that the governesses"—here she glanced apologetically towards me—"should not dance; so Miss Sterling had better sit down; I will have a chat with her instead. Horace, don't try to persuade her; dancing with you too, that only makes matters much worse."

Her ending of the sentence certainly did. Poor Miss Davenel, her want of tact always defeated her

good and benevolent intentions. The first part of her speech I could, and would have acquiesced in as one of Mrs. Davenel's rules, which, however over rigid, it was my duty to obey. Had she ended there, I would have complied at once; but all the opposition in my nature—of which, alas, I have plenty!—soon rose within me, when I thought I was not considered good enough for even the simple ordinary courtesy of one dance with the son of the house.

He was furious.

"Anastasia, you are a fool to meddle as you do," he ejaculated in low hurried tones. "You can't expect any girl of spirit to attend to such nonsense. Come, Miss Sterling, I will not be cheated of my pleasure;" and putting his arm round my waist, and drawing me to him with almost a fierce gesture, we joined the others, he at once falling into the slow and graceful movement which had made me already distinguish him as the most proficient there in the terpsichorean art.

Perhaps I could scarcely help myself, so decided had he been; but, whether or not, there he was, and there I was, I am afraid enjoying myself much in the same way in which a child thinks the stolen plum by far the sweetest in the orchard. Our dancing went

very well together. However, before we had completed our third turn round the room, before even I saw Mrs. Davenel in full glare at me, I felt my senses—at least the right and good portion of them—come back to me; so, checking him, I uttered the most atrocious fib, exclaiming:

“I am tired, do let me stop!” and resolutely drew myself away from him. He was obliged to stop, but cried:

“I don’t believe you are in the least tired, your face is not flushed; you are so good a hand at this sort of thing that a whole evening would not knock you up, much less one five minutes. However, you shall rest if you like; we will go into the conservatory, it is so cool and nice, and we shall have it to ourselves; then, when you are no longer tired”—here he gave his little cynical laugh—“we can resume this or some other dance. Several dances with you I must, and will have.”

“Indeed you shall not, Captain Davenel,” I answered quickly; “I shall not dance with you again. I was very wrong to disobey Mrs. Davenel’s rule, and if she is angry with me it is only what I deserve. I suppose just at the moment I was annoyed, and so let you have your own way; indeed I scarcely know how I could have prevented you;

but I have come to my senses again, so please I will go to the piano, and there I will stay for the rest of the night."

I felt much distressed, vexed with myself, vexed with him, desperately hurt altogether.

"So be it," he rejoined, in gentler tones as he saw my discomfiture; but with all the Davenel obstinacy rampant in him, he persisted: "So be it; but I will be there too. I will not be treated like a child any longer; my mother shall not have it all her own way. You are nicer, sweeter, more attractive than any girl here. I will let them all see what I think of you."

I had placed myself on the sofa, near the piano, waiting to resume my post as soon as Miss Browne vacated it. I felt so weary, so incapable of stemming the tide, that I scarcely noticed how he resolutely seated himself close to me. He went on speaking I know not what, I hardly listening, till at length, almost like a tormented creature, I turned on him.

"I thought you said we were to be friends!"

"So we are," he answered, "you have no truer friend than I am, and will be, if you will let me."

"I do not thank you for such friendship as yours," I responded warmly. "It is a man's idea of it, I suppose, and means your own gratification, having

your own way, and not caring what pain you may inflict by so doing. You say you will stay here the whole evening. Well! you will, I suppose, do so, if you choose, for I cannot prevent you; cannot myself move away, as I must go on playing. You do not mind that every moment you linger here draws down on me more fully your mother's displeasure, brings on me the notice of the whole room, a notice the reverse of pleasant—and you call this friendship! My idea of it is far different; a true friend would be keenly sensitive for his friend's feelings, would be considerate, would encourage to the right, would influence for good, would deny himself for his friend. Captain Davenel," I concluded, my voice softening as I laid my hand on his arm, for I was so absorbed in what I said that I forgot where I was—"Captain Davenel, this is the only friendship I value and care for: we can only be friends on these terms—that we do right. I was wrong to disobey your mother just now, and you were wrong to persuade me; let us undo that mistake: you go, and amuse your guests, and leave me here, and then I shall feel you are my friend."

I rose as I spoke, for the dance was ended, and I was resolved to resume my place at the piano. A little throng had formed round us, accidentally,

by a knot of people talking together, who hid us from the rest of the room, and from themselves, as their backs were to us.

He stooped, and seizing my hand, raised it to his lips, gently kissing it. As he released it, he said:

"Any influence for good there may be between us will only come from your share in the alliance. I am not, and never shall be, worth anything. Just let me stay near you a little longer, just through this next dance, and then I will do what you wish."

I could not refuse this very slight favour, it seemed like making so much of the affair; and surely while I was busy playing Mrs. Davenel could not mind; so he stayed there watching my fingers as I went more or less jerkily through a set of Lancers, which was next set down in the musical bill of fare. He made from time to time sundry amusing comments on the dancers, but seeing I did not respond so lively as usual, frankly owned he wished to bring back the smiles to my face. "That wistful expression you have in your face, when you are troubled, is not unbecoming, but brightness and cheerfulness are more natural to you, and you seem only meant for them."

He said this with great pathos, but I answered him, I am afraid, snappishly; for I still felt exceedingly worried, and even regretted my small concession when I saw Anastasia's long-drawn face turned on us with prophetic woe, as the figures of the dance from time to time brought her near us.

"I don't suppose," I jerked, as one does jerk when one talks while playing, "I don't suppose I am meant for anything but just what I have to be, and to make the best of it. You will make a ridiculously morbid self-conscious woman of me if you go on in that 'pity you' sort of style. I was quite enjoying my evening till lately, and if you will only go away I mean to like it again. And please, I must ask you not to talk, or at any rate, not to expect answers. I am not clever enough to do two things at once. That last figure went all wrong because you made me laugh. And, oh dear! there is Mrs. Davenel coming."

In my extreme dismay I bent my head low over the keys, apparently intent on the music, but did not fail to catch the furious glance the old lady shot at me, as she marched solemnly by me up to the sofa, where she placed herself next her son, whom she addressed with unwonted severity. "Horace," she enunciated, every syllable begun and ended with

elaborate carefulness, as was her wont when angry—"are you going to spend the whole evening buried here?"

"Maybe," was the cool rejoinder; "I am rather comfortable in this corner, and when so, don't like to be bothered."

"The Miss Denmans have been sitting out a great deal; do go and ask one of them to dance. Besides, since you came here Miss Sterling's music has not been at all good. She should have sent you away."

Here some magnetic influence warned me that a look, sharp, keen, and withering, was directed towards me.

"I should not have thought Miss Sterling's music could ever have been anything but good. I would sooner be here watching her play, than be with any of the stupid women you have brought here. I am not allowed to dance with the only one I care to, and yet you expect me to be pleasant and agreeable. However, you must not blame Miss Sterling for my being here; she has done her best to get me to move, and I should have done so by-and-by if you had not interfered."

"Oh Horace! how you pain me," answered the poor mother. "I always want you to enjoy yourself,

and I brought all these people here solely for your amusement."

"Please spare yourself so much trouble on my account, Mrs. Davenel; your guests only weary me. I never did care for this sort of thing. I only acquiesced in this evening because I thought you would do it properly, and never supposed you would victimize for the whole night a young lady who is worth all the rest of them put together."

"You are utterly unreasonable," she retorted angrily; "Miss Sterling herself told me she liked playing for dancing. I am perfectly willing she should rest sometimes, only I will not for her alter rules which have always been. I am sorry that girl ever came into the house, and——"

Here an imperative "Hush!" on his part made her lower her voice so that it was, except for a word here and there, inaudible to me. But I heard him say, "If you do that I will make you regret it;" and then came almost a whimper in the tones with which she answered, "She would do nothing to annoy him, if only——" and then again the voices sank lower, so that I did not understand.

I have seldom felt more uncomfortable than I was as I sat there chained to my post, from whence I could not avoid hearing the dialogue, which happily

was not heard by the rest of the company. I was evidently the cause of serious trouble between mother and son, and I longed to go up to them and tell them I would leave The Chase at once rather than that this misery should continue.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. STEWART.

MRS. DAVENEL rose when the Lancers came to an end, and with a weary sigh moved to the other end of the room. Captain Davenel, who had fallen several degrees lower into the depths of one of his most sullen moods, settled himself still more firmly into his comfortable corner, as if he meant to be always there. I saw that his mother, fastened on by one of her guests, had her back to us, so I turned to him, pronouncing his name in pleading tones, which made him at once raise his head, and look at me. I went on:

"I could not help hearing much that was said just now. I am very unhappy about it. If I am to be the cause of dissension here I shall leave."

"*You* leave! Do you think I would let you? My mother would not dare to send you away—I told her so just now."

"Yes, I guessed as much as that," I answered sadly; "and I am only here on sufferance as far as she is concerned. She would be only too glad if I took the law into my own hands, and left of my own accord. And so I will," I added, gathering firmness as I went on, "if things get no better, for I too cannot bear this."

"You must not—you shall not leave. What would Kitty—what would all of us—what would I do—if you went away?" He bent forward, eagerly fixing those wilful eyes of his on me, as if with them he would root me, like the lady in "*Comus*," to my place. "I will do anything you like if only you will stay. You frighten me when you say what you will or will not do, for you are cold and obstinate. I believe if you fixed to go you would; you would vanish in the night, and your place at the table would be empty to-morrow. Only stay, and I will be your very obedient slave; you shall tell me what you wish and I will do it."

I did not answer him at once, but sat there thinking. Perhaps if I could bring about a salutary change in him—if I could only get him not to vex his mother, all might be well and I need not go. Indeed, I did not wish to leave *The Chase*. I had grown very fond of it, of Kitty, and of Mr. Davenel.

I felt too that my pupil really needed me, that my going from her would be a sore blank in her young life. On the whole I managed fairly well with Mrs. Davenel, she complained less of me than she had ever before done about a governess. There was really only this one point of disunion between us; and I was sure, if only this unreasonable man could be induced to keep himself in his proper place and leave me in mine, that the old peaceful monotony of my life here might again return, and I vex no one.

The people were all filing off into the supper-room, so, my services not being just then wanted, there was nothing to disturb my cogitations, which my companion did not seek to interrupt, though his eyes never for a second moved from my face. At last I turned to him and spoke.

"I do not wish to leave The Chase," I said; "I am very fairly happy here. I love your niece very much, and should hate to part from her. If you will promise to do nothing as regards me which would vex your mother; if you will not join Kitty and me in our walks, all of which she dislikes, then there is no reason why I need go away. Your mother will soon see she can trust me, and though she may never like me, she will not wish to send me away. Besides, I cannot bear that she

should have all this annoyance." Then, before he could answer, I went on still more earnestly. "May I venture to say that I think you do not realize how distressing it is for others to see your manner to your mother? I feel, too, that lately it has been even worse because of me. I cannot stay here unless you alter in this. I cannot bear to be the cause of extra unhappiness to her. Try and alter in this; and if also you will only leave me quiet, and undisturbed in my daily life, just doing the duties for which I came here, I do not see why all may not come quite right even now."

"Why should you be so tender for my mother's happiness?" he asked; "she is none too kind to you."

"Perhaps not," I replied, "but she is not able to judge fairly of me; and I daresay she thinks me to blame for much. Besides, you must remember though she dislikes me, and shows she does, still she is never actively unkind. Lady Garth spoke very wisely and kindly to me that day I was with her, and since then I have tried to look at your mother with different eyes, and doing so see that she is often not happy, so that I am learning to be sorry for her."

"That is, of course, very amiable," he rejoined,

that dreadful cynicism returning; "but I do not see why you should spend yourself in being sorry for her. We are not a very lovable family, except the dear old governor; but still I don't see what she has to worry her, unless it is that I annoy her at times; and if I do it's all her fault."

"Oh Captain Davenel!" I exclaimed, "are you never to blame for anything?"

"Of course I am sometimes, you dear little judge, who sit there so quietly passing my luckless self through a small judgment-hall of your own. But it is all her fault, because she just fooled me to the top of my bent all my life till at last my expenditure went even beyond her wishes and frightened her a bit. She is always absurdly anxious about me—body, mind, and morals—all I believe. It is almost insupportable the way she pries about and watches me. If it had not been that I have one reason, one special reason, why I wish to be here and nowhere else, do you suppose I would stand this? No; I would be off and far away; though perhaps she is right in this, that I am not up to anything just now, so am best at home."

He paused, a weary look came into his face, then seeing I looked still far from happy, he changed into a softer tone.

"However, you are right, as you always are, and to please you, I will try to be nicer to her and everybody—to be a good boy all through. No one else, Miss Sterling, would dare say to me what you have done to-night; I wonder what there is about you that makes me not mind it from you. I think it must be your simple honest fashion of going straight to the point. You are different from other women in that. You are very true, true as steel, and that is one reason why I——"

Here he stopped, so I broke in, half smiling :

"You think much too well of me. I have plenty of faults, as you would see if you knew more of me. I have been told I carry even my love of truth too far. Here, by reason of my office, I am always on my best behaviour, but indeed if you saw me at home, you would not think me very different to anyone else. It is, however, most kind of you not minding my speaking so plainly, also your promising to try to alter. I will now add one bit more of plain-speaking. Will you please carry out your good resolutions at once?—do go into the supper-room, and be seen attending to your guests for the rest of the night."

"But surely," he said, obediently rising—"surely the man at the wheel may be permitted refreshment

too. If I may not take you into the supper-room, at least I may bring you something here."

"No; I can't even allow that," I laughed; "a servant can fetch me what I want just as well."

He grumbled, but had to go; and soon some supper was brought to me, delicately chosen, carefully thought for, showing well a more than servant mind had arranged the things. I was almost alone in the room now, only one or two extra flirty couples, despising the creature comforts, were busy talking their nonsense at remote distances. I eat, and I must confess, enjoyed my small meal. I felt I had done the best I could for the present, and must trust to the future, so I let myself appreciate the quiet and stillness, and sat placidly looking through the open door near me into the grateful half light of the grand old hall, which never seemed more beautiful than when in contrast with the brilliantly lighted reception-rooms. It was only a little after twelve, and was yet too early for departures, nevertheless the sound of wheels struck on my ears, coming nearer, nearer, and then ceasing.

Soon in the far distance I saw the huge hall door open, while two or three of the servants clustered round it. "Someone has evidently arrived," I thought; "who can it be? Mr. Stewart is not expected for two or three days yet, so it can't be he." While I

speculated, a footman came up to me asking: "Is master in the supper-room, ma'am? Mr. Stewart has arrived, but does not wish anyone but him to be disturbed."

"Yes, your master is there, I will tell him." I felt a wish to have the pleasure of myself taking this pleasant news to the dear old man; so going into the crowded room I slipped between the people, till I came to Mr. Davenel, who was talking to a stately-looking dowager. I touched him on the arm, and then whispered to him my tidings. His face brightened with intense pleasure.

"Excuse me," he said to the lady, "I am wanted." Then beckoning me to follow, he walked quickly towards the hall.

"It is just like Faulkner," he remarked. "He was always fond of pleasant surprises."

I meant to go no farther than the piano, but found the new guest was already standing near it. It did me good to see the greeting between the two men—it was so warm, so hearty.

"This is worth coming back to England for, Mr. Davenel. Your kind face and welcome are the pleasantest things I have met with all these weary years," were the words which, in the most musical voice I ever heard, fell quickly, and yet gently, from

Mr. Stewart's lips. "I was intending to sleep at Compton," he went on, "but hearing you were keeping late hours to-night I could not resist getting here a few hours earlier. That small daughter of mine is to blame for my impatience. She is sure to be in bed ages ago, but I wish to get a glimpse of her before I sleep."

"So you shall; so you shall, my dear Faulkner, when you have had something to eat. Come into my study, and have it quietly there."

"I want nothing, thanks; I dined, or rather supped, at Compton. I only wish one peep at Kitty, and then bed. I am dead tired after travelling all the way from Brindisi without stopping; but I had business of importance in London, which, however, only took me a few hours, instead of the two or three days I had feared being detained there. For once—onces which don't often happen—all things went speedily and rightly. Lawyers even hurried. So seeing I was so soon at liberty I thought I would come here immediately. London in August is not tempting, and I wanted to feel at home."

"And you are, my dear boy," said the old man, with welcome shining out of every feature in his genial face. "This will always be, I hope, the real best home for my Mary's husband."

"Thank you very much, sir," replied Mr. Stewart, while a shade of sadness came over him as he again clasped Mr. Davenel's hand.

I was standing a little apart, so interested in my intense observation of Kitty's father that I almost forgot I was there.

Mr. Stewart, who looked about forty, was a man a little over middle height, his face certainly plain in repose, but lighting up with wonderful animation when he was either listening or speaking. The eyes—literally his only good feature—clear, penetrating, and full of the keenest intelligence. He had a singular quietude of manner, which gave a feeling of rest to those about him. One soon felt as if one could instinctively go to him in any difficulty or trouble, and find help. I think this arose from an intuitive consciousness of the latent strength and power which hid themselves, as it were, under his curiously gentle tone and speech, but which gave him such an enormous influence over other people.

I noticed, even now, how Mr. Davenel's usually fidgety manner was stilled as his son-in-law went on talking, though I could not hear all that was said, and how he acquiesced instead of arguing the point as he usually did, when Mr. Stewart remarked :

"I do not wish Mrs. Davenel, or any of them,

to be disturbed about me; it will be time enough when we meet to-morrow. I shall be then less jaded than I am now. You of course are an exception. I felt I must see you; and now for Kitty. Please go back to your guests, sir, or you will be missed, and this big unwieldy cat be let out of his bag. Someone can show me the way to my little girl's room, and then I daresay you will give me a shakedown somewhere."

"There is no one fitter than Miss Sterling to show you the way," said Mr. Davenel, turning to me; a notice which filled me with dismay, as I had drawn back almost as I thought out of observation, and as much out of hearing as I could manage it. "By-the-way," Mr. Davenel continued, "I must introduce you to her. She is the young lady I have told you of, who is sometimes more of a child even than yours is, and yet whose slightest word your Kitty obeys, and that more from love than fear."

I felt so grateful for these kind words, and my face must have shown it, for Mr. Stewart smiled as he cordially shook hands with me.

"I think, he said, "love will always compel truer obedience than fear, for it enforces willing obedience. I quite believe this of you, Miss Sterling; and I

need not tell you any friend to my little girl is my friend too, if she will be."

Men have their faults, and mighty big ones too—selfishness reigning like a huge giant over the smaller fry; but they beat women in one thing—they are larger minded, larger idea-ed; and when they are pleased, and wish to show it, they do not dole out their praise with scant and niggard hand, as so many women are apt to do, but they offer it generously, and from their heart.

Mr. Stewart must have seen I was a little embarrassed, for he gave me no time to answer as he continued speaking.

"I shall be much obliged to you if you will show me to Kitty's room; but I will not keep you long from this pretty scene." Then, bidding a cordial good-night to Mr. Davenel, he stepped into the hall, I following. We went slowly up the great staircase, and neither of us spoke, but I did not feel the silence oppressive. My companion kept glancing around him, and once or twice breathed a half sigh, as if the seeing again the old familiar scenes brought sad memories to his mind.

When we were in the gallery he paused a long while, leaning against the carved balustrade and

looking down into the vast hall, which, illuminated here and there by a few lamps, was in that delicious half light which is such a rest to eyes and mind. Here a ray of light shone on a lovely group of ferns and flowers, or revealed some gleaming marble statue, or richly-carved cabinet. There were also refreshing breadths of dark shadow, with dim quaint outlines showing through them. It was like a charming stage effect, too, the seeing through the open doors into the brilliant rooms beyond. Someone was playing a waltz for the benefit of a few who had returned from supper, and it was wonderfully picturesque to see in the distance the pretty graceful forms in their long shimmery robes floating in time to the music. I thought Mr. Stewart had forgotten my presence; but without turning to me he said quietly, as if he felt I too appreciated the scene before us:

"Is it not a pretty sight? From a boy I have so loved this place, and especially this one portion of it. Few houses in England can boast of anything so lovely as this old hall, though in other respects they may be far grander. Do you admire it?"

"Indeed I do," was my response. "It is an ever fresh pleasure to me; but pretty as it now

is, never to my mind does the old hall look so beautiful as at sunset. There is a stained-glass window yonder, through which the light falls on the oaken floor in such gorgeous colours. I often come here, if I can, at that time, just for the enjoyment that sight gives me."

"I remember that window well," he answered with animation. "When I was a youngster it used to be my colour-school, as I called it. I often tried to paint it; and oh, what daubs and caricatures of its beauty used to be the result of my efforts! It did me a good turn though, that same window. The impossibility of attaining the effect I desired cured me of a weak taste for painting, which never could have resulted in much, and which, indulged in inordinately, would only have unfitted me for other work. As it is, my small gift just serves my turn in giving me reminders of places I admire; but I never attempt more than the mildest sketches. Do you paint?"

"Only a very little. I love music so much more, and the love of the two is never great in the same person?"

"There I fear I must differ with you," replied Mr. Stewart. "I have sometimes—though, I confess, not often—seen an almost passionate appreciation of both in very artistic natures."

"But," I answered, "granting that the love for the two arts may originally be in equal degree in the same person, can the power of perfecting the two arts be there? Must not one taste become subordinate to the other? I do not know that I make myself clear, but perhaps you will understand," I concluded, blushing slightly under the penetrating look he gave me as he turned fully to me while I spoke.

"I do understand you," he said, "and I cannot argue against you now, for I certainly think that genius must throw itself into one line and give itself chiefly up to that; but all the same, it is a pity when it neglects or fails to appreciate all other tastes. It is impossible to tell how a universal love for the beautiful—such as may be, and is possessed by rarely cultivated natures—does not enhance, strengthen, and purify the one grand talent which is being trained to the utmost." He paused, and then resumed, a slight smile lurking round the corners of his lips: "The moral of my sermonette, Miss Sterling, to which you have listened with most edifying patience, is that you must not neglect your painting, if you have any small gift for it, because you have a so much larger talent for music."

I smiled too, and promised demurely that I would—the very next day, if he thought it advisable—

make an attempt at the stained-glass window and its manifold rays.

"That's turning the tables on me with a vengeance," he said, "considering how I have just confessed to you what a damper it was to my aspiring genius." He laughed, such a pleasant musical laugh, with no ugly background of bitterness or satire anywhere about it to spoil its cheeriness. "We must leave this pretty effect now," he went on, "which with old memories will mingle itself with my dreams to-night."

"I did not know you were much here when you were a boy," I ventured to say as we passed along.

There was in Mr. Stewart a something—I could scarcely define what—which made strangers involuntarily and speedily bridge over the river of stiffness which flows through most English natures; for here was I talking easily and comfortably, as if I had known him for years, and already wishing that the distance to Kitty's room were twice its length.

"Did you not know that the Stewarts and Davenels have been connections and friends for generations?" he answered. "I spent most of my holidays here, and rare games and sports we used to have in the old schoolroom, whither we are now proceeding."

"It is difficult to fancy that now," I remarked. "Except when the house is full, it is so still and quiet; scarce a footfall to be heard or a voice above a whisper."

"You do not like that, I suppose; you like more stir—more bustle, eh?"

"I am afraid I do," I answered laughing; "but you must not think I grumble at it. Besides, I assure you, your little girl and I are merry enough at times in our own haunts."

"That I will be sworn you are. You do not look as if you could be gloomy for long. Kitty's letters have had a brighter, merrier tone in them since you came here and took her in charge."

As he finished speaking he turned the handle of the schoolroom door, and we involuntarily hushed as we neared the room where the sleeping child lay.

"That is the door, Mr. Stewart," I said, pointing to it, and preparing to wait for him while he went in.

"You must go in with me. You forget Kitty only knows me from my photograph. If she awoke by chance and saw me there she might be frightened, unless you were there also."

"That's true," I answered. "It was stupid of me not to think of it."

So we went together to the bedside, I holding-

the light so that it fell on the sleeping child, and yet somewhat shielding the glare from her. How beautiful she looked. What wonder if that father's heart filled with pride and love as he gazed on the exquisite little face, with the long lashes resting on the delicate pink cheeks, the golden hair tossed in pretty confusion over the pillow. One little hand lay idly on the counterpane, the other held tightly in its grasp a small morocco case, and on the sweet lips was a smile, as if she were dreaming of the very father who stood so near her now.

"See," I could not help whispering, "that is your likeness which she holds there. I believe she could not sleep unless she had it by her."

He just glanced at me for one moment with a bright smile, then turned again to the child. A deep silence was in the room, but it did not seem oppressive to me, as from time to time I stole a look at his face and saw how it softened, and felt what a world of memories, and perhaps holy thoughts, must be giving to it that wonderful pathos. At last he stooped and kissed one of the golden curls, murmuring: "My little motherless one, may God bless thee and us!" then, rising, he returned into the next room. There he sat down, resting his head on his hands in deep thought. Presently he spoke.

"My little girl looks wonderfully sweet and pretty; but she strikes me as rather fragile and delicate. Do you consider her so?"

"I do not think her strong; but still I see no cause for anxiety if plenty of care is taken."

"That I am sure you give her. But have you sometimes difficulty in carrying out your kind wishes? I think it is best we should be frank with each other; I do not mean to treat you as a stranger."

"I myself always prefer being quite open and frank," I answered; "so I will tell you all you wish to know about your child. I think Mrs. Davenel is so very strong herself that she does not understand delicate health in others—so perhaps arranges too many lessons, and does not keep Kitty in enough on chilly days. But lately, since other things have worried, she has let me do more as I liked."

"What other things?" he asked, not unnaturally.

"Oh nothing," I said hastily. "At least nothing to do with Kitty."

"And nothing, I hope, to worry you," he said kindly. "I know well that though Mrs. Davenel has, as I trust we all have, her good points, still she is a little over strict at times. I hope you are fairly happy here?"

"Oh yes, quite enough so; and I daresay everything will be all right. Mrs. Davenel quite trusts me now with Kitty, and that is the chief thing," I responded, feeling as crimson as the curtains, and hoping to divert him from the awkward turn I had, as usual, after my blundering fashion, given to the conversation. But indeed my mind was still so full of the late squabble between mother and son, and the effect it might have on me, that I found it almost as difficult to keep it out of my talk as Mr. Dick had found it to keep Charles the First's head out of his Memorial.

"I am very glad she so trusts you," Mr. Stewart replied. "I have heard from everyone how happy you make my child, and I wish you also to be happy. I will not ask more now, or even later, unless you wish it; only I would like you to remember, Miss Sterling, that now I am home again, you can, indeed should, refer to me on all matters connected with my daughter. I have no wish ever to go against Mrs. Davenel's authority in all things reasonable, and am very grateful for her kindness; still it is Kitty's father who will now finally settle all for her. In other things which may trouble you, if I can help you, I trust you will let me do so. Remember, when I said

my little girl's friend would be, if she wished it, my friend also, I meant it—and friend with me is a word with its deepest, fullest significance.”

I looked up into his face, wondering how far his ideas of friendship coincided with Captain Davenel's, and hoped it might be a less feverish and uncertain sentiment than that which had been already proffered me. I thanked him, and said, if it were ever in his power to help me I would go to him ; and that it was, and would be a great relief to be able to have recourse to him in any little difficulty which might arise about the child.

“Then,” said Mr. Stewart, “we will consider this all comfortably settled, and I am glad we have had this small explanation together. Now I must go ; but before doing so will you do me one favour ? Can you manage that I have my first meeting with Kitty alone ? I do not want to see her in full family conclave—that would be terrible.”

“Of course it would, and the contrary can be easily managed. If you are here any time from eight to nine to-morrow morning you shall have Kitty all to yourself, I promise you.”

“You must promise me then to take a longer rest, I am sure you will need it.”

“I must not think about resting yet,” I said,

smiling. "I don't suppose those people will leave for another hour or so; indeed I ought to go down and play. Mrs. Davenel will be wondering where I am."

"You look almost as fit for bed as I do," he said pityingly; "but I suppose you must go. Do me one more good turn, light me to my room, which is, I hear, at the end of the passage, where I am not so very far from you and Kitty."

I did as he bade me, and shook hands with him at the door of the room which had been hastily prepared for his reception. I then sped down to the library as fast as I could, finding myself just in time to resume the list of the dances which supper had suspended.

What a multitude of thoughts flitted through my tired brain as, more than half asleep, I still managed to make my hands do their now mechanical work. I no longer watched the dancers or derived amusement from their good or bad performance. Captain Davenel, his mother, and Mr. Stewart all seemed to flit before me in a sort of phantasmagoria, but through all my fatigue ran the pleasant thought, that as regarded Kitty, I had now more to do with her father than with her grandmother. I had not thought this would be, and yet it was stupid of

me not to expect it, for what more natural than that the father on his return should take up his rightful authority? It was such rest to feel I was no longer dependent on caprice and temper, but had what I felt sure was a calm clear judgment to apply to; also I knew now that the delicate child would be cared for, body and mind, far better than I had yet been able to manage it.

At last the evening came to an end, and I returned to my room, where, scarce taking time to undress, I fell asleep almost before my head touched the pillow, but soon awoke to restless feverish fears and anxieties, which at night assumed the gigantic proportions with which weariness and darkness often seem to invest our midnight imaginings.

CHAPTER XV.

LEARNING TO KNOW HIM.

TOWARDS morning I slept again, this time very soundly—so much so that Mercy's entry and exit were unheard; and only at last a gentle murmur of voices from the adjoining room roused me from my slumbers.

"Who can be there with Kitty?" I thought, sleepily rubbing my tired eyes; but presently I remembered that it must be Mr. Stewart making acquaintance with his child. I had left a piece of paper on Kitty's dressing-table the previous night, telling her not to disturb me, but to wait in the schoolroom till I came to her; and no doubt she had found her father there already.

I lay placidly listening to the deep bass and the childish treble blending together; now a laugh from one and then from the other showing they were fast

becoming friends. "They are very happy," I thought, "and want no one else, so I need not hurry." I therefore dressed most leisurely, till at last Kitty's voice came through the keyhole.

"Miss Sterling, father hopes you are not getting up; he says you must be so tired, and he will make your excuses to grandmamma."

The "he says" was enunciated with such new-born triumph, as if there could be no appeal against father's authority. I smiled as I thought it would not quite do, at such a delicate crisis in my affairs, further to irritate Mrs. Davenel, and answered that I was very little tired, and was already dressed.

"Then come here at once, we want you. May I come in?" I gave permission, and the happy little girl appeared, and soon insisted on taking me into the other room, where I saw Mr. Stewart, outside the window, leaning over the parapet, and looking at the wonderful water panorama before him. He seemed very intent in thought. It was, as I afterwards found, his way to throw himself entirely into each moment, and just now it seemed as if nothing could rouse him from his profound meditation. Kitty and I stood quietly near him, and it was only when the child's tiny hand stole into his that he turned round, looking at her with intense affection.

"So, young woman, you won't let me think my 'thinks' out," he remarked playfully, and yet shaking off his abstraction with a visible effort. Then perceiving me, he greeted me, saying: "Good-morning, Miss Sterling; I must confess you do not look as if you had taken all the good you ought out of the bed, which must have been extra welcome to you after your exertions for the public weal. You still look tired, or is that your ordinary wont?"

"I do not think it is," I replied; "I generally get complimented on my rude health and most untired aspect, but last night, for a wonder, I could not sleep much, and when I did my dreams were so distressing that the waking time was preferable."

"I am sorry," he answered kindly; "however, you will I hope soon recover yourself; indeed a few draughts of this glorious air must soon bring back the roses to your cheeks. Do you not find that this," he said, pointing to the bright silvery sea, "gives you even more pleasure than the pretty scene we both so admired last night?"

"Yes," I replied, "this satisfies me more entirely; for however beautiful the dear old hall, or even the most spacious building may be, it lacks the infinite space which only a view like this can give me. I like to feel that, far beyond where my eyes can see,

this mighty ocean is still stretching on in its majesty. I like to feel that for hundreds and hundreds of miles it has no limit. All this takes me out of my own littleness. Ah! it is difficult for me to explain how I love this view." I spoke this warmly, for I knew he would not laugh at or ridicule my enthusiasm as so many might have done.

"You need not explain," he said, "for I see it in your face. With you, admiration of scenery is a feeling which stirs your nature to its utmost depths. Have you seen much that is beautiful?"

"No," I answered, "only the pretty country round Durnford, where my home is, and this. I often fancy to myself what it would be to see those great mountains one reads of, towering into the skies, with their pure white summits. It must be the very perfection and glory of beauty; and yet I could believe that so much grandeur might oppress, if one were shut up in it—if one had no outlet anywhere for the distant view I always seem to long for, so that I may feel the 'beyond' in nature. You have, I doubt not, seen a great deal. Is such a feeling realized in such scenes, or is it a mere fancy on my part?"

"People do feel like that sometimes," he answered,

"nay, I have even felt it myself, when I have been on all sides surrounded by gigantic mountains, standing like sentinels, watch and ward around me. Though feeling to the utmost the power of their severe beauty, I have longed to sweep one away, or to mount up so as to see the 'beyond,' as you phrase it. But it all depends very much on the mood one chances to be in; there are times when the laziness of the valley life suits me best. I have passed months beneath the shade of some mighty hills, wishing for no outside world, no distant view; but there are other moods when I have felt the oppression, the confinement, and have longed for a wider prospect." He paused, then went on: "I hope you will see more of this wonderful world, its beauties will not be wasted on you. I will wish for you that much travelling may come into your life."

"Please don't wish Miss Sterling to go away," interposed Kitty, with dismay. We both laughed, and I assured her I saw no likelihood of my travelling just yet, so she need not be afraid; then turning to him, I said: "It is of course a pity to have seen so little as I have done, and yet I am almost glad that travelling, if ever I do so, will come to me after I am grown up. I do think I could now appreciate it; it would not be wasted on me, as it often is on very young children

who are taken about unknowing and uncaring for what they see. Do you not think it is best to travel late in life ? ”

“ Like all questions,” he answered, “ there are two sides to it. Many people think that the early education in the beautiful is worth all the after teaching ; others again think it wiser that it should only come when the taste has been cultivated, the intellect ripened.”

“ What do you think ? ” I asked.

He smiled as he replied : “ You will call me very undecided when I tell you I agree with both views. I believe there are some natures which need developing, need to be taught the beautiful, and these should travel early ; while for others in whom taste is innate it is almost wiser to reserve that *first* impression of the beautiful, which is so precious, till it can be always remembered ; in fact, be a *first* impression, which in a young child’s mind it cannot be, at least, not an impression which can remain on it. I know a girl who never saw fine scenery till she was nineteen, but whose instinctive love of it had led her to feel the beauty of even the stunted trees and hedgerows of the ugly country she lived in. When at last she went to Scotland, when suddenly the loveliness of loch and hill broke on her it almost

overcame her, she had to turn away to hide the exquisite tears which enjoyment had drawn from her eyes. She had almost dreaded lest she should not appreciate, so little did she know what was in her; but the intense pleasure that scenery gave her, pleasure with the dim outline edge of pain which perfection rouses in artistic and sensitive natures, proved to her that she valued it as she ought. She was always grateful that the new sensation came to her when she was old enough to enjoy it, and remember it, and said it fully made up for the lack of beauty in her earlier life."

"I think I understand that curious mingling of pain with the pleasure, that sort of vague longing which comes to one when one sees what is very wonderful," I said quietly.

"I was sure you would," he said; and then we were silent, and stayed awhile listening to the soft splash of the waves on the beach below. At last I broke the pause. It was such a treat to me to be able to say out my thoughts just as I used to do at home.

"I wonder the dwellers in very beautiful countries are not much better and nobler than we who only see what is mediocre. If one were always living amidst God's greatest wonders surely it would

be more difficult to us to do mean and base things. How is it that people who are always surrounded by the unspeakably grand are no better than we are?"

"Your word 'always' is the best answer to your question," Mr. Stewart replied. "People become so used to wonders which are 'always' round them that they see only the commonplace in them. If they do appreciate, it is generally a latent appreciation, which only comes into being when they are removed from them, and learn to miss and pine for them. I fear daily contact with the beautiful has little or no effect on daily life. We who travel would not feel the charms of it so much as we do, only the contrast with the comparatively tame scenery of dear old England is so striking that it takes us out of our usual apathy; and with some the thoughts are instinctively raised to God, whom we ought to, but do not, revere as much in His creation of a simple leaf as in His greater works. But I fear the enthusiasm aroused by snow-clad mountains or splendid torrents is but the first impression, and leaves no permanent trace in the heart or life. It is sad how soon one grows used to the beautiful. In India and Ceylon I have often travelled through the most marvellous passes, where the wonderful colouring, the gorgeous sunrises, the infinite

glory of the whole, simply defy description; and yet a passing annoyance, some slight depression, physical or mental, or even the companionship of a jarring element, has often prevented that intensity of feeling, that going out of our poor selves, which one would fain have at those times. It must also be remembered that love for scenery has only become the fashion in this last century. Who ever thought, for instance, of admiring Scotland till Walter Scott bade us do so? We have to thank authors and poets for telling us what to admire. No one thought formerly of travelling just to see the beautiful."

"But surely," I said, "this divine taste which has now been taught us, will never be a fashion which like others will pass away, and be forgotten?"

"If it be divine, assuredly not," he said, with a peculiar light in his eyes; "but, whether the effect it has on some people be divine or not, I believe this poor, fevered, worn-out world could not now forego the blessed rest which it has learnt to associate with nature. This taste came when it was sorely needed; the need is not likely to pass away, so the taste will last, I doubt not. With your sex it is very cultivated. I have noticed that women—women, I mean, of a higher than ordinary type—get

more lasting pleasure from scenery than we do. I believe it is because we men have so much always coming and going in our lives that we do not give leisure to thought, to quiet admiration. In your less tempted, less worried lives, calm enjoyment has more time to fascinate, to enthrall."

I did not feel that I agreed with him there. Even the cleverest man can but feebly read into a woman's heart. I knew that the forms of society, and woman's innate wish to hide her deepest feelings—her worries even—from others, give to the most reasonable among us that aspect of "calm enjoyment" the fact of which he thought so enviable, though he could little guess how often that fact is only fiction. Also I thought that the engrossing occupations which come into a man's life give far keener enjoyment to his holiday moments, than a woman can ever feel in her more desultory existence. Besides, the fact must be remembered, that a man's deeper education trains all his faculties to a greater pitch of intensity than ours can ever attain to. Some of these ideas, after a crude fashion, I might have presented to him to prove that I did not agree with him, but the breakfast-gong, which our watches told us was later than usual, sounded, and the conversation came to an end, to my real regret; for it was such a blessed

change from Captain Davenel's half-captious, half-cynical remarks, or from Mrs. Davenel's dictatorial laying-down of the law according to her own interpretation thereof, which precluded all real discussion.

"Father, we must go at once, or we shall be late," said Kitty.

"Must we?" he smiled. "Would the punishment be so very terrible if we proved defaulters? Well, I also like punctuality in moderation, so we will obey orders. Also I feel very decidedly hungry. What a difference English air makes; I shall enjoy my food to-day as I have not done for years. You, Miss Sterling, will think this but an unromantic ending to a somewhat high-flown discussion, but we men at best are more subordinate to the claims of the dinner-bell than you women, with your more refined natures."

I laughed, assuring him that Kitty and I must be the reverse of refined, for we generally hailed the gong with delight, our previous hour's lessons sharpening our appetites to a very fine edge.

We were now on our way to the hall: Kitty prattling to her father at nineteen to the dozen; I, a little apart, absorbed with my own anxieties as to how Mrs. Davenel would greet me. It was not that I feared scolding or instant dismissal, I

knew her awe of her son would prevent either; also I was beginning to realize that Mr. Stewart's return was not without its influence on my destiny, that his authority over his daughter extended even to that daughter's governess. I knew instinctively that from him I should have fair-play, and the most impartial judgment if trouble arose; still I did not wish that trouble should arise, for every reason; and very prominent among them came a feeling which had been growing deeper in my heart since Lady Garth's talk to me, and that was compassion for Mrs. Davenel, also a great wish that she should one day do me justice, a wish I could not help having, though it seemed so little likely of realization. "If she would only be open with me," I thought, as I followed the other two in silence.

So potent was the awe inspired by their hostess that a larger number than might have been expected, considering the last night's dissipation, were gathered at the upper end of the hall, waiting the filing in of the domestics for prayers.

Mrs. Davenel had a slight and unusual flush on her cheeks, as she stepped forward to greet her son-in-law, there was also unwonted discomposure as she uttered the correct words of welcome, which however had no heart or warmth in them. The manner in which he

returned her greeting was characteristic of the man, the kindness which he always showed was there, but the geniality seemed frozen out of it. He almost ignored a welcome which obviously did not ring true, as he made some commonplace inquiry after her health, and congratulated her on being so unchanged in appearance. Then, as if flinging a weight from him, he turned with evident relief and hearty cordiality to Captain and Miss Davenel and the other people present, most of whom he seemed to know. Surely there must have been some awful passages of arms between these two in former days, I thought, as I marked the contrast between the faces which brightened at his approach, and the one exception to them in the proud woman, who stood there with lips a little tighter compressed than ordinary, and who then went silently to her reading-desk, from whence she expounded to us somewhat more briefly than usual.

At first she had ignored my presence, but her son whispered to her, and then, with a heavy frown, she shook hands with me ungraciously enough, hoping I was not tired. I answered in as few words as possible, then hastened to place myself at the breakfast table between her and Kitty, the post usually assigned to me; but as Mr. Stewart insisted on sitting on the other side of the child, and also on drawing me

into the conversation, I found the meal a much merrier one than it had ever been before, as far as my share in it was concerned.

Strange to say, Mrs. Davenel did not seem to mind his talking to me, nay, seemed rather to encourage it; and when a week's holiday was proposed by him for Kitty in honour of his return, she gave quite a willing assent.

I supposed that my solitude would be almost uninvaded during the time, and promised to myself much reading and practising, for which till now I had had but little leisure; but no, I was mistaken, for I was generally included in all the excursions and amusements which went on. I had never been absolutely neglected at The Chase, had always been treated with civility, but excepting the day I went to Compton Castle, no attempt had ever been made to throw the smallest variety into my life. I always stayed at home, even when my pupil went out; but now it was different, for from the first Mr. Stewart resolutely included me in all Kitty's pleasures. Once I heard Mrs. Davenel say coldly: "I do not think it necessary Miss Sterling should join in everything."

"But I do," was the prompt reply. "She ought to go, and be where her pupil is. Besides, her love and affection for my Kitty are beyond what is given

by the ordinary governess. It adds to my pleasure to see them happy together; also Miss Sterling looks such a mere child herself that it would be a shame to shut her out of such small pleasures as we can give her."

What more was said I do not know, for not wishing to hear further I slipped away as fast as I could; but from that moment I felt how sweet it was to work for one who was so kind, and how his consideration and thought impelled me to do a hundred-fold more for his child than I had yet done.

I came in for much variety and enjoyment even when Kitty's holiday was over. The lesson hours were diminished after her father had carefully gone into the matter; and though he deferred to Mrs. Davenel with both tact and respect, still he brought it about that more leisure, rest, and fresh air were now thrown into his little daughter's life.

I had my full share in this happy change. Mr. Stewart did not come near us when we were busy, but usually appeared at our tea-time, rarely leaving us till the dressing hour; and though at first I tried to absent myself, it ended in my staying with them by their united wish, and in my joining in all talks and discussions which ensued. Kitty and I learned more in our non-lesson times during those happy

days than when we had grammars and dictionaries about us. It was curious to me that so clever a man should take pleasure in the talk of a child, and of one only an older child, as he often called me, when a bit of ignorance on my part drew from him a genuine but never ill-natured fit of laughter.

Among other things Kitty was taught to ride, and I had to accompany them, so that I might ride with her when he was gone, he said ; a remark which invariably drew from Kitty that "he must never go away." Once he answered to this : "But I must earn my bread, little one."

"There is plenty here for all of us, father. Why should you not live here always ?"

He only made a grimace at this, as if dependence at The Chase would not be to his taste. It seemed strange that Mr. Davenel's son-in-law should be poor, but so it was. As I said before, he had never profited by a penny of his wife's money, which was being accumulated for Kitty's benefit, who would one day be quite an heiress on a small scale.

Mr. Stewart had nothing but a small pittance of his own, which, he would laugh and say, "would just give him bread-and-cheese in his old age." He had scarcely laid by a penny out of the good income his appointment had given him ; his nature

was a generous one, and he loved to spend freely, more, I believe, on others than on himself. "He had no reason to save," he would urge, his daughter being provided for, and he being all alone; so as fast as the money came into his hands he would get rid of it. Since his wife's death England had become distasteful to him; foreign society, with its *bon-homie* and genial unstiffness, being much more to his liking than the frigid restraints of our too company manners. He would not have returned home even now, save for his little daughter's sake, but he wished to be near her for a few months, to judge how all was with her. He told me—not then, of course, but a long time afterwards—that if he had not seen her so happy with me he had intended removing her from The Chase to some other guardianship. He had never been really satisfied with his child's letters till after I became her governess, when a bright cheeriness had come into them, so different from the flippant tone or weary depression which till then had pervaded them; and this change had convinced him that a happier, healthier element had now come into her life. Still, though not so anxious about her, he wished to see what I was really like, so he sought every opportunity of knowing me thoroughly. He wished to be sure whether he was right in leaving her

with me, so young as I was; leaving her, as he knew, so much to my sole care.

These were his very natural reasons for seeking to draw me out, for using all his powers of attraction to win my liking, so as still more closely to rivet my regard for his child. The odds were against me from the first. It was never my way to analyze why people were kind to me, or to suppose they had any ulterior motive for being so. I just enjoyed, without going into the why and wherefore. I soon knew that the moments in which he talked to me were the pleasantest of the day, but that was not surprising, he being so agreeable; but when almost a feeling of envy rose in my mind, if as his wont was, he devoted himself to others besides me, I ought to have guessed that I was getting too engrossed—but I did not.

I tried to remember how much older he was, how different was his position to mine; I tried to keep myself in the background: but could I help enjoying being with him—could I help feeling from the first that there was a great sympathy between us? If an unusually lovely strain of music fell on my ears, or an exquisite effect in scenery, or a beautiful picture delighted me, it seemed as if I must turn to him, being sure of a responsive glance from him—being

sure that he would share in my sensations. It was this mute yet eloquent language between us which, as weeks and months went on, knit my inner nature to his so closely. Often he and Mr. Davenel joined us in our rambles, and then, his being essentially a gay and blithe disposition, he would give himself up to the enjoyment of the moment, and we would all vie with one another in merriment, till Kitty, our grave little Kitty, in whom fun was more sympathetic than innate, would wonder how grown-up people could laugh at such small things.

But what I loved most of all were his graver moods, when as we grew more intimate, he would talk of olden days—never about his wife, of course, nor of the years she had been in his life: for with really deep natures there must ever be a sacred hush about their beloved dead; but he would often speak of the time before his marriage, of his mother, who died before he attained manhood; of his only sister, who had married a foreigner who lived abroad, and whom he scarcely remembered, she being older than he by many years. He would tell me of his boyish hopes and adventures, and then he would speak of his Indian life, and his sometimes loneliness there. It was his way, within certain limits, to be very confidential where he trusted, and perhaps I was not to blame in feeling it sweet

and precious to hear so much of the inner life of one who had grown so high in my esteem, in living over to myself the scenes he so vividly portrayed, in showing to him how completely I sympathised. By degrees I began to feel as if my present happy life must always go on, as if the future could not be without the charm of his presence, or if it were to drag its weary length without him, as if for me it would be blank and colourless, like a November sky, from which the sun seems to have hidden its warm brightness for ever. My only trouble in all those weeks was Captain Davenel. He tried to do as I wished in not irritating his mother, but was always on the verge of breaking through rules; and, though he was never *tête-à-tête* with me, still, in numberless little ways he evinced his strong desire to be with me. He did not perceive that his company was now less than ever desirable to me; not that I ever felt otherwise than gently towards him, really liking him as I now did. I am glad to remember that, beyond the necessary coldness to repress, I was always friendly with him; but I had now become engrossed with the new interest which had grown into my life, which was becoming my life, and which rendered me more and more abstracted from all save

the child, who was if possible increasingly dear to me for her father's sake.

Mrs. Davenel was perfectly acquiescent all this time. I believe she saw all quite clearly, and felt that if Mr. Stewart's partiality for me ended in my caring for him, it would be the best thing which could happen. She did not suppose her son-in-law would become attached to me; also knew he was almost too poor to marry, and had never seemed to wish to do so since her daughter's death. So she thought it very unlikely I could really attract him, and did not suppose others would be as foolish as her son. She trusted that Captain Davenel's feeling for me was a passing infatuation, of which my indifference to him would be the easy cure. For my feelings in the matter she did not care one jot. What did it signify to her whether or not I suffered? She would fain have sent me from The Chase, but dared not—had no longer the power to do so; also had no reasonable pretext for such a measure. That being so, nothing could better fall in with her plans than that I should be in love with Mr. Stewart, who would be little likely to return it, but the effect of which, she hoped, would be that Horace Davenel would tire of his attachment to me.

Wishing all this, she threw no obstacle—nay, rather the reverse—in the way of my seeing as much as possible of Mr. Stewart, and no doubt marked with cold satisfaction the increasing pleasure I took in his society. At the time I noticed nothing of all this; as I before said, I never analyzed my feelings. I only knew I was happy when I was near Mr. Stewart, and that sufficed me. Sometimes I wondered that Mrs. Davenel agreed so amiably to all plans and excursions; but thought it was because of the influence her son-in-law seemed to exert over everyone, and which even she could not resist. It was only afterwards, when it was too late, that I could read, as in a book, the real reason for these changes in her, and then I laid, and justly too, at her cruel feet, much of the pain and sorrow which had come into my life.

I think Lady Garth would have given me a friendly caution had she been near, but very soon after Mr. Stewart arrived, she and her husband left Compton Castle for some months. I saw them two or three times previously to their departure, even spent one or two days with them—a pleasure Mr. Stewart brought about for me; but except that Lady Garth said she thought Mr. Stewart wished “thoroughly to know me, so that he might judge whether or not he could invest me with even more

responsibility as regarded Kitty after he left England," she made very few remarks about him. I told her, in answer to this remark, that I was very glad he should study me as much as he liked ; I was willing he should see even my faults ; for should he decide on entrusting his treasure to me, it was best he should see the bad as well as the good in me.

But, as I daresay is generally the case, I did not let Mr. Stewart see my faults very clearly after all. Perhaps the only innocent, because unconscious deception, is that which we practise towards those whom we love. How can we help trying to set ourselves in the fairest light before them, trying to adapt our thoughts and feelings to theirs? No doubt Mr. Stewart saw me as ever so much better than I really was. I was so happy too, so bright, so joyous, that I was, without much effort, at my very best. There was little to spoil my pleasure. Captain Davenel I avoided as much as possible, and Mr. Stewart's departure was still a thing in the far future, so I need not yet dread it. In looking back on those happy, happy weeks, I seem to see no shadow in them anywhere.

END OF VOL. I.

